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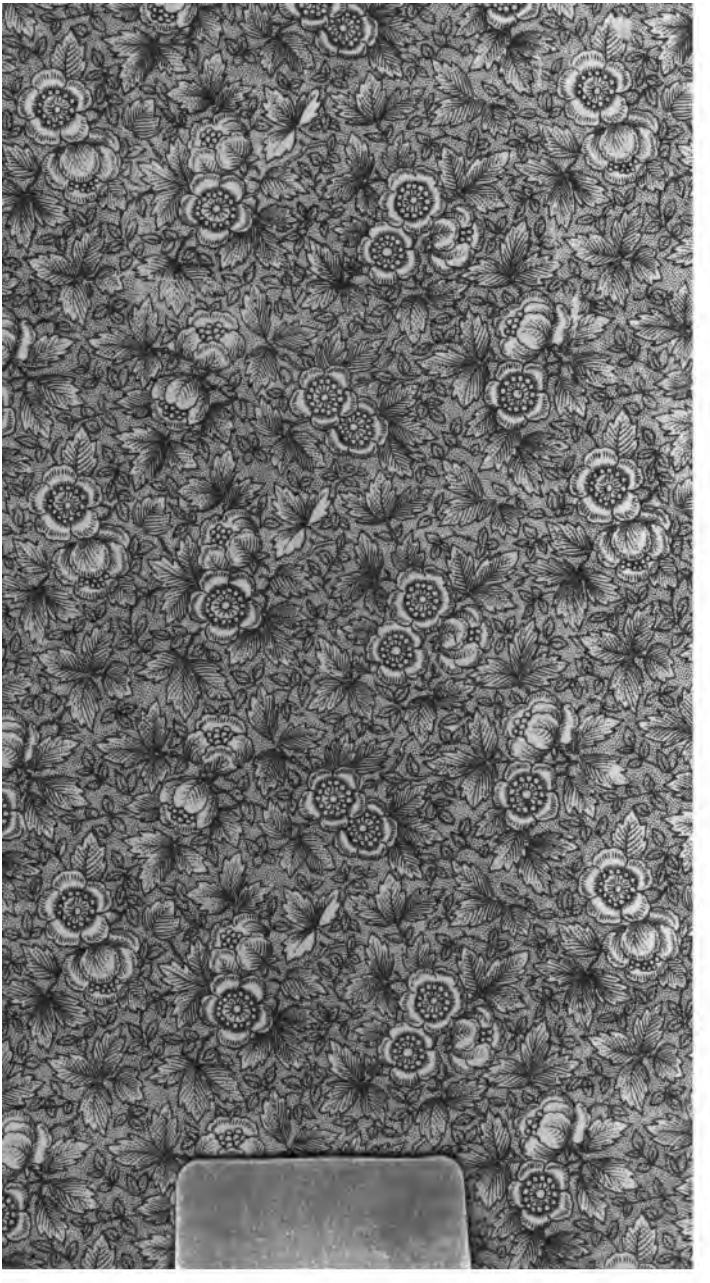
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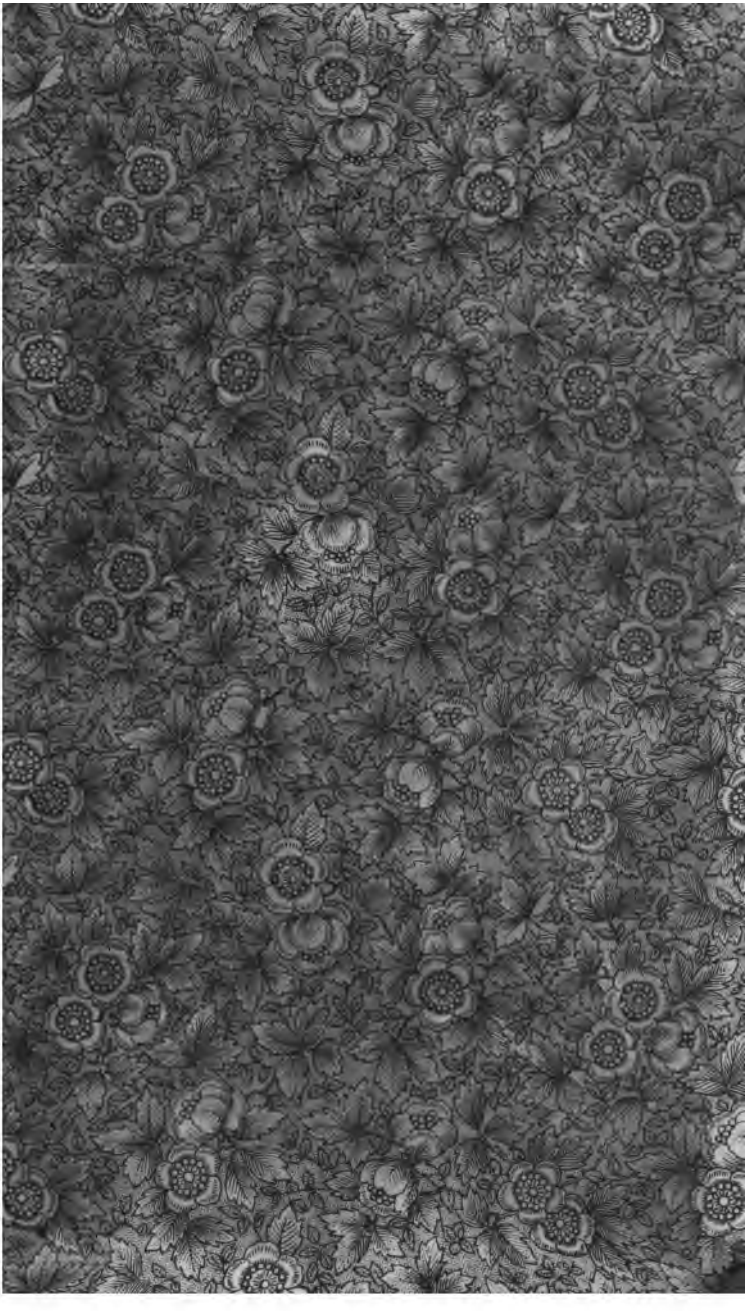
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A FEARLESS LIFE

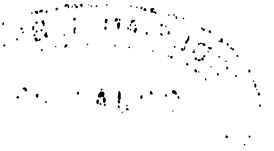
BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THROUGH THE STORM"






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A FEARLESS LIFE.

BY

CHARLES QUENTIN,

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH THE STORM," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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A FEARLESS LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

A JOYLESS VOW.

EVELYN HOLT was pretty, admired, loved, but she never had enough admiration and love to satisfy her. It entered her little brain one day, as she saw Nora Severne pass before the window, that she should like this girl to admire her. It was pleasant to win people by sweet looks and words. This girl Nora was so independent, so careless of any one's love or attention, that it would be quite a victory to make her wistful of smiles and friendship. She had heard Allan Moore say that Nora Severne was clever. What was this cleverness that people saw in her? Evelyn wished to judge of it for herself. It appeared to her to

consist in being brusque in manner, rather ill-tempered looking, very wild, and in doing things that no well brought up girl would think of doing. Evelyn disapproved of those studies carried on at Wreck Cottage. There was something sadly unfeminine, ungentle, in acquiring Latin, and other strange manly erudition from an old boat-builder; and Allan's occasional presence at these lessons made them the more objectionable. Nevertheless, Evelyn was curious about these studies, and found in herself qualifications for shining at these meetings. She pictured herself seated by the window in summer, or the fire in winter, not actually working hard like the others, but suggesting, throwing in a brilliant word now and then, and distracting the learners in quite a pretty way—displaying a pretty condescension to old Jos, a pretty appropriation of Allan, and a pretty patronage of Nora. Of course, she knew, and had often been told, that she was not full of heavy learning, but she had natural talent, natural wit and intelligence, which was much more delightful.

Evelyn set a little snare for Nora Severne.

Miss Dixon, having called on the doctor's

daughter before she had been a week at Cairn Cove, the dragons of etiquette were voiceless, and Evelyn felt herself justified in taking any step towards friendship with Nora. She wrote, therefore, telling her that she had heard from Mr. Moore that Nora was fond of reading, and that she hoped their little library might be useful to her, adding that Nora's visits to their house would be a great boon to a lonely invalid.

This little note, couched in such winning terms, did not bring tears to Nora's eyes, nor yet lend wings to her feet to carry her to Sea View. Nora only felt very sorry that Miss Holt had written, and extremely puzzled for a minute as to how she should reply; then she explained herself very simply on note paper of an indifferent quality, in vigorous writing, marred somewhat by occasional blots. She never went to see any one, she did not like people, and was always very busy, so Miss Holt must allow her to refuse. She was sorry, because she thought Miss Holt was kind.

The letter in no way resembled Evelyn's scented and rose tinted note; but in spite of this reception of her first overture to friend-

ship, Evelyn did not feel baffled. Her soul craved for a friendship with some girl to whom she could represent herself as she fancied she truly was, and who would see her in the sentimental light she desired. No such instrument for the perfecting of her life could Evelyn find in her own home, for she had not a sister, and her brothers, aged from ten to sixteen, were not formed to be the solace she sought. Their natures, she considered, were rather brutal. They took an inordinate delight in the low pleasures of eating, and rough games; and, with a total disregard for her refined feelings, were in the habit of remarking that Evelyn was an awful fool. She looked round the world, the world of Cairn Cove, and selected Nora Severne as one who best fulfilled the conditions required by her in a friend.

The fateful intimacy between the two girls was begun one autumn day on the sea-shore.

Nora had taken a book, and was sitting among the rocks by the sea. She was out of the glare of the sun, but she could see its glorious light on the waters, painting a thousand colours on the waves, whitening the sails of the little fishing-boats which were coming in

to the coast. Nora counted them eagerly, for she knew how many had gone out. They were all there. She began to think with what anxious eyes a girl would look for her lover's return, if he were at sea. He would come, perhaps, and sit by her side here, and tell her all that had happened since they had parted; he would hold her hand and look in her eyes to see her joy. Well, it would be a joy gained by pain. Everything seemed balanced. The limit set to everything in life was irritating, might, under certain circumstances, be maddening, and seemed to place poor creatures at the mercy of unknown forces.

Nora felt impatient as she thought of it.

Was it really so? The proportion of ease, sickness, wealth, poverty, friends, enemies, which made up the bearableness or unbearableness of material existence, was measured out in such a way that, perhaps, there was not much real difference in the total of men's outward lives, and a line seemed drawn, over which no one passed; but the unrestricted life of thought—there was no limit to that. The way we look at all, see beauty or ugliness, stumble along, clutching at some one's hand or

walk bravely in the paths we choose, this is our own kingdom, to which there are no confines.

Nora's book slid down on the sands. She clasped her hands round her knees. She was off into one of her reveries. She needed more action in her life to drive her from dealing theoretically with every position, and fancying she could not be mistaken. She was so busy, wielding an imaginary power and adjusting all things by her clear sightedness and strength of will, that she did not hear a step on the sands, till some one said—

"May I come and sit near you; it is so nice here?"

Nora looked up, and saw Evelyn Holt, who held out her hand, and smiled. Nora got up, looking bewildered, and blushing.

"I know your sister and aunt," Evelyn added, "and I think I ought to know you."

Nora was still bewildered. Evelyn's manner was so assured, so old, it quite puzzled poor Nora.

They sat down together on the rock. Nora looked at her new companion. Her skin was delicately fair and clear; there was a little

pink tinge in her cheeks; and her eyes had a lustre in them, which Nora thought she had never seen in any eyes before.

Evelyn took up the book which had fallen; it was a volume of Bacon's works.

"How clever you must be," she said, "to read this! I don't think I should like it. Don't you like poetry better than this sort of writing?"

"I like both," Nora answered, with a slight sense of superior wisdom.

"Nothing is so beautiful as poetry. Sir Walter Scott and Tennyson, and Cowper and Lamartine—don't you love them all?"

"I don't know anything about Lamartine; Cowper is stupid; and Tennyson—— No, I don't like Tennyson; he bores me."

"How strange? And Byron, don't you like him? Isn't the 'Bride of Abydos' lovely?"

"I think I like the funny parts of Byron best."

"You don't mean 'Don Juan'?"

"Yes; some of that is funny."

Nora smiled as she thought of it.

"How naughty of you to read it! I have

only read a few lines of it. Is it very bad? Do you think I might read it?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. I should feel so afraid of blushing, if it were talked of; every one would guess I had read it."

"It would not much matter if they did."

"Yes, it would. Fred always says it's dreadful of girls to read bad books; that if people knew, they would never speak to them; and that no one would ever fall in love with them."

"Then I'm afraid I shall be very disconsolate," Nora said, laughing.

"You need not tell."

"I don't want to hide it, and I don't care who knows."

Presently, after a little silence, Evelyn said softly, "Do you ever write poetry yourself."

"Poetry? No," Nora answered, with a contemptuous expression.

"Are you sure? I think you must have tried. I often look at you, and think you have such a poetical face. Do tell me if you ever tried."

Nora did not dislike her girlish flattery, as

it seemed sincere; she only felt inclined to laugh.

"No," she answered; "but I suppose you write verses, as you think I do?"

Nora said "verses," instead of poetry; she felt capable of knowing the difference. The distinction was unnoticed by Evelyn. She looked down a minute, and did not speak; then said—

"How can one help it? Everything is so pretty; I want to say how pretty the earth is."

"But you can't," Nora answered quickly. "How can what you think be as fine as the sunset or the sea?"

"No; but I like to put my thoughts into words sometimes; and, as no one sees or hears what I write, it does not matter if it's foolish."

"Do you never want people to hear what you've written?"

"Yes, sometimes. I often fancy you would understand; but you are so clever, I am afraid of you."

"If you are not afraid of writing, why should you be afraid of me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. Yes, I do know; but I

can't explain. I'd like to hear your verses. Won't you repeat some to me?"

"Shall I? You won't tell any one?"

As Evelyn said this, she fervently hoped that Nora would think her poem lovely, and tell Allan of it; and then how sweet would seem to him her humble denial of all intellectual capabilities. She nestled up close to Nora, and began.

"You wrote all that yourself?" Nora asked, when she had ended. "It sounds very pretty. I could never have written it, though you think me clever."

The measure and rhyme was good, and the melody of it graceful; but secretly Nora felt it did not much matter whether it was written or not. She smiled a little at the contentment it seemed to give Evelyn.

"You will go on writing," she added; "and some day you'll write much better, and want the world to hear what you say—won't you?"

Evelyn looked disappointed.

"I'll never write better. I don't think one can improve in poetry. It comes into my head at once, and I write it; at another time I cannot write a word. There is no pleasure

n life if one works and worries oneself—not for a poetic nature, at least. Don't you agree with me?"

"I don't think I do."

"That's because you keep to yourself, and read dry books. I am sure you don't enjoy yourself a bit. You never see people; but you'll come and see me sometimes, won't you?"

"I don't think I will."

"You are as nice and pretty as any one," Evelyn said patronizingly, "if you did not do such wild things."

Nora laughed.

"I never thought I wasn't."

"Mr. Moore was talking about you the other day, and telling me how nice you are."

"Allan does not know much about me."

"Yes, he does. He told me that you are quite a scholar, quite learned."

"He was only joking," Nora said hotly. "I know nothing at all. I am just as ignorant and wild as people think me, and only care for the sea and the fishermen; and I don't want to have anything to do with educated people!"

"Not with me?"

"I don't know; you are very kind. But I'm not going to see you in my best clothes, and drink tea, and make out talk, and be told I look nice when I don't. I shock all the hypochondriacal old women by saying that I don't know what it is to feel ill. Girls look at me with affected wonder, because I've no accomplishments, and can handle an oar like a man; and men take no notice of me at all."

"You are great friends with Mr. Moore?"

"Yes, pretty well; but I don't want to go to parties to see him."

"You take walks with him?"

"Sometimes."

"And go to his studio, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"How clever he is! He paints and writes and makes statues."

Nora thought Evelyn's praise undiscriminating, and did not feel inclined to join in it; but her companion would not allow her to be silent.

"Don't you think he is very clever?"

"He knows a good deal. He has not done much yet; but I suppose he will some day, if he is not bothered."

"But is it not foolish of him not to go into the Church? He could go on with his art."

"And make a delightful life by preaching sermons and painting pictures!"

"But what can he do if he's not rich?"

"Work."

"Yes, that's very nice, of course; but he can't give his life to art, if he has not money. How can he do anything? How can he go to Rome or anywhere to study?"

"I think our discussion won't help him much."

"You don't like to talk about him? I think men are interesting. I like girls, too, and I am sure I could love a girl, who was a real friend, better than any one else in the world."

She looked pathetically at Nora, whose lips inclined to a smile.

"Won't you let me love you?" Evelyn added.

The smile expanded into a laugh.

"If you can manage it."

"It won't be difficult, dear."

Evelyn's face looked soft and winning, and

her silliness seemed only the silliness of girlhood, and was rather attractive.

Nora had often seen girls going about arm in arm, whispering their confidences, laughing at their jokes, and they looked happy. She felt inclined to try the friendship of Evelyn, but she would not be led into any expression of affection which might be false. She clasped her hands round her knees, swaying herself back on the rock, and looking at Evelyn. Presently she said—

"You are very pretty, and I like to look at you, but I don't feel as if I loved you a bit; and as I am not likely to meet you often, I don't suppose I'll grow fond of you."

"Oh yes; we'll meet often. I'll come and sit here with you. Now I'm going home, and you'll walk with me."

They both rose, and Evelyn slipped her hand into Nora's arm, and looked quite lovingly at her. This irritated Nora. She hated the sense of being touched or clung to; it destroyed her freedom as she walked.

"Don't take my arm," she said abruptly; "I can't breathe, if you do."

Evelyn drew back from her, and stared.

"You don't understand," Nora said hastily. "I hate any one near me; it stifles me."

"Well, you shan't be teased. I'll come and sit a long way off from you, and talk to you. I like to talk to you."

Finding there was no response to this, Evelyn tried another topic.

"I hear you row yourself out alone on the sea. Is it true?"

"Yes."

"Are you not afraid?"

"Afraid of what? Of the sea-birds, of the waves, or the winds?" She laughed, and then continued, "I know all about the winds. I can see them mustering up their strength to blow hard; the clouds tell me so plainly when they are going to be angry."

"Still, I should feel safer if a man were in the boat. He would know what to do, if there was any danger."

The basis of Evelyn's philosophy, religion, scheme of life was a man!

"Waiting for some one who'll know what to do, that's the occupation of most women's lives. Why not know how to do the things yourself?"

Before Evelyn could reply to Nora's strong-minded views, they saw Allan Moore coming towards them.

Nora had not shared Clifford's belief that Allan loved Evelyn Holt. She had tried to dismiss the thought from her mind. She would not allow a mere conjecture to spoil her happy hours. She had told herself often that it mattered little whom he loved, for had he not said he wished she were his brother? Had she not known well, since that day in the studio, that Allan might meet her with frank kindliness, might even grow fond of her as time made them faster friends; but that never would his heart throb at her approach, or his eyes glisten with such love as flooded her whole life, filled her with a wild forgetfulness of everything but his presence, or saddened her with a strange sorrow which she yet scarcely understood?

To-day, as Allan drew near and took Evelyn's hand, Nora knew the truth. Instantly in Allan's eagerness, in his half-veiled delight, in the new, tender expression which she had never seen in his face before, she read the story of his love, and knew that this girl

beside her was dearer to him than even Guy Clifford dreamed. Ah! she knew, she knew. And as Nora thought this, looking at the man to whom her young love had gone forth unasked, she suddenly felt she must know Evelyn well, must learn if she were worthy of him, must know what it was that Allan loved in her. Surely, he could not be won by mere prettiness! Evelyn must be lovable for other things than her fair face and graceful ways.

Allan was pleased to see the girls together. He thought Nora's companionship would be pleasant for Evelyn. In his eyes, Nora was the subordinate in everything, and, as a ministrant to Evelyn, would be glorified. He looked at the two girls, noting the marked difference between them at a glance. Evelyn wore a pretty white dress, so managed by her maid's ingenious fingers, that it added to her look of refinement and grace. She was walking languidly, seeming as though love and gentleness were the very air she breathed. Nora was clad in the simplest, coarsest of dresses, and wore a hat of rushes, which some fisher-girl had plaited for her. She seemed impatient of this dawdling pace and social

talk; her eye had somewhat the restless glance which you see in the eye of a tame deer in a park, when it looks at the woods and mountains afar off. Allan admired Nora's just proportions and noble throat, on which her head was poised with singular grandeur; but there was too much activity expressed in her every movement to attract him, or make his eyes rest on her with pleasure. His ideal was the fragile girl who walked beside her, whose liquid, languid eyes were always raised with an appealing expression.

"We were talking," said Evelyn, "of Nora's love of boating.—I may call you Nora, may I not?" she said parenthetically, turning towards Nora, and just laying her hand on her arm.

"Just as you like," she answered, shrinking away from her a little.

"Are you not surprised that she is not afraid to go out alone?"

"Nora is so familiar with the water, it is almost her home."

"I want to go out with her sometimes, but I think I should be frightened."

"Then you must not go."

"Of course not," broke in Nora. "If you are in a fright, you are sure to come to grief."

Evelyn looked appealingly at Allan.

"I think I must be a great coward," she said.

"A terrible coward!" he answered, smiling and looking at her with a glow of love in his young face, which made Nora turn her head away with a quick-drawn breath of pain.

"You will both come home with me?" said Evelyn.

"No, thank you," said Nora. "I am going now."

She waved her hand, turned round the corner of a house, and left them.

When Nora was alone, she stopped, and laughed to herself.

"I am not suited to be with people like that," she thought—"people brought up on the Church catechism and the piano. If Evelyn Holt begins to like me, it will be for something that I am not, but that she imagines I am; and, as that would be a swindle, I must not allow it!"

She laughed to herself again, but the laugh broke off abruptly.

This girl Evelyn had many things—beauty and friends, a father, a happy home. Why should she have everything? She could have done without Allan's love; it was not all, all, all to her.

The beautifully curved lips drooped, and the passionate eyes clouded, as Nora measured the pain that had come to her to-day. Then the ever-varying face changed again.

"It's a right punishment for unmaidenly forwardness," she said, mocking herself. "A well-regulated mind could never give love unsought! A modest maiden must be blind and deaf and senseless altogether; must make sure of gaining something before she gives anything!"

A weary smile was on her face now. She walked back to the sea, and stood on the sands again, and the music of the waters was a lament to her.

"It would not have mattered so much to other girls," she thought, feeling some sort of soothing sympathy from looking on the waves she so loved; "but I—I must love him always. I wish I did not care; but how can I help it? There is only Allan in the world. I must be

in his life somehow, even by serving the girl he loves."

She raised her head, and looked far out to sea; a bright colour came in her cheek, her eyes glowed.

"I'll think of him always, always, and give my life to him. I'll love him and serve him as no other woman ever can, come what, come will!"

She watched the boats go by, and swore it to herself. She watched the red, red sunset, and the first signs of a coming storm; and again she swore this to herself. Then, with a quick, passionate movement, she dashed away the tears which had gathered in her eyes, and turned homewards, singing as she went.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

THERE was a sound of music at The Dell: the village band, two fiddles and a cornet, were playing merrily. Men and maidens were footing it gleefully on a wooden platform in the garden. The daylight had not quite died down. Miss Dixon's guests had eaten and drunken, and this was the hour of dancing.

Nora stood at a window and watched them. She could not very distinctly see the faces below her, but she knew all from their figures and dress. Of course, that was Catherine in white, who had left the dancers with Squire Armfield, and moved away towards the walk through the trees. That was Miss Holt, in pale pink, sitting down and fanning herself. Allan Moore was there, too; and Nora longed to go down amongst these people, just to hear

his voice and see his smile; but she glanced at her plain cotton gown, and told herself it was impossible. By-and-by she listened to the laughter and glad voices, and heard the beat of the feet as the dancers glided round; and her young pulses throbbed, her face flushed, and the youth in her heart claimed its part in the pleasure. What did it matter about her dress? So she went down. She plucked two roses from a tree that grew on the porch, and placed them in her bosom; they were her only adornment. She stood close to the dancers, and no one noticed her at first, but by-and-by Allan came and spoke to her. She had felt isolated, and as if she had no part in all this merriment, and a sad loneliness was in her young heart; but now, at the sound of Allan's voice and touch of his hand, she was new-born. Life was glowing with delight, the autumn evening was rapturously beautiful, the world full of happiness.

"Will you dance with me?" he said.

Her face lighted up with pleasure. They joined in a country dance. The movement, the music, the young faces round her, the

touch of Allan's hand, all was intoxication; she felt exquisitely happy.

"How pleased you look!" Allan involuntarily said, as he saw her sparkling eyes and heightened colour.

She answered with a laugh as she danced. They stopped at length, and Nora heard Catherine's voice close behind her.

"You have no idea how ridiculous you look."

For a second Nora flushed painfully, but she turned and answered—

"Do I? Perhaps so; but I don't care at all. And Mr. Moore had the courage to be my partner."

"You dance beautifully," Allan said with enthusiasm.

"Don't you aspire to be Miss Nora Severne's partner?" said Catherine, turning to Armfield. "Let me introduce you."

"Upon my soul," he said, bowing, "I should be delighted, but I'm engaged for every dance."

Nora looked at Armfield from head to foot with an amused expression.

"That's fortunate," she said gravely. "I could never dance with you; you are much too

elegant, are in a sphere far removed from mine."

The little curl of her lips was answered by a flash of hatred from Catherine's eyes.

"If you can only display your village manners here," Catherine said calmly, "you had better keep to your usual associates."

She moved away, and Nora found herself alone, for Allan, too, had disappeared. She crossed the garden, stood under the trees, and watched the people walking to and fro.

The moon had risen, and its light fell on the grass, the flowers, the trees, and on the moving figures. It was a pretty scene.

Nora stood in the shadow and watched them all. Presently she heard steps on the gravel walk behind her, but she did not move. Then some one stood beside her. It was Guy Clifford.

"How dull you look here alone," he said. "Are you sad? Has any one been unkind?"

"No, not at all. This is my way of amusing myself."

"It's not mine. May I stay with you, or will you come and dance?"

"No, I'm not inclined to dance; I tried it

once. I'm not like the others—not that I care; but they don't wish to see me there."

"You are not like the others, that's true," he said gently.

Clifford's manner was more tender, more reverent to Nora than it had ever been with any other woman. This frank, fearless girl, with her simple ways, taught only by her own pure heart, had more power over him than the most fascinating woman of the world.

Nora did not seem to notice Guy's remark.

"Evelyn Holt looks beautiful to-night," she said. "I think that you are right. Allan likes her, loves her."

She raised her head, and looked at Clifford eagerly.

"More fool he," Guy answered. "But I suppose a man must meet his fate some day."

"Do you think it's fate? Do we blindly love some one without knowing why? You can't think that? Something in people's natures draws them together."

"I'm blessed if I know. I'm not much good at dissecting human hearts, and understanding why they ache and why they're glad."

A little path ran through the thin belt of trees where Nora and Clifford were standing. On this path Catherine and Squire Armfield walked saunteringly. Catherine's conversation with the squire was interesting to her, so was the conversation of which a few words had reached her ears through the trees. It was difficult to attend to both, but she exerted her powers of attention valiantly.

"I like dancing with you," the squire said condescendingly. "But a fellow gets so used up after a London season, that he does not care for much exertion of this kind in the country."

Catherine had just caught Clifford's last sentence, and was gratified by the careless tone in which it had been spoken. Nora was evidently trying to turn the conversation into tender channels, without success.

"You go out night after night, I suppose," she said quickly, with a look of interest, "and dance with all the beautiful women in London? Our country manners and country faces must be rather uninteresting to you afterwards."

"Well, upon my soul, I don't care much for any one here, except you. I think I've told

you pretty often that you'd look well anywhere."

"But, you see, I'm not tired of hearing it."

"You like it better from my lips than from the country bumpkins, eh?"

This was accompanied by an affectionate leer. Armfield had come to the age when any little delicacy which youth and diffidence might have lent to his courtship had been rubbed off, and there was a patronizing confidence in his manner, which he found very successful with the type of women he specially admired.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Catherine. She was getting annoyed that it was now impossible to hear what Clifford and Nora were saying. "Some of the country bumpkins are very good looking. Guy Clifford, for instance."

"He's a good-for-nothing scamp. I've my own notions about him."

"Hush! not so loud. He is at present standing at the edge of those trees, talking to my step-sister."

Catherine led Armfield down the walk again.

"That reminds me," he said. "I wish, as your extraordinary sister is always with Thornton, and that class of people, you would try to find out something for me through her."

"What is it?"

He bent his head and whispered to her; but Catherine at that moment was listening intently to the words of Clifford and Nora. The latter was saying—

"I suppose, if any one cares very, very much, he or she can't be quite hated?"

"I hope not," Guy answered. "It would be devilish hard; but I'm not sure. The love, if it's not returned, may bore the recipient; and people hate to be bored."

Catherine could hear no more. She had two distinct impressions in her mind: one, that Nora was doing all she could to fascinate Clifford; the other, that Armfield had been whispering just now something about Wreck Cottage, Nora, Clifford, and smuggling.

"You don't think Mr. Clifford is a smuggler, do you?" she said, on the chance of the remark being *à propos*.

"I did not say so; but there is some mystery about the fellow. And I hate a man

that comes amongst gentlemen and pretends to be one when he's not."

"And how can I find out about him?"

"Women are so damned sharp, they can ferret out anything; and if you can get me the least hint, I'm all right. Of course, it is my duty to see that everything is square in the country."

"How do you know I shall not tell Mr. Clifford what you've said?"

She pressed her hand very slightly on Armfield's arm.

"Because I flatter myself we have some interests in common, and because I fancy I can trust you. I may be wrong."

He drew himself up stiffly.

Catherine laughed, then leaned towards him and nearly touched his ear with her lips, as she whispered—

"You may be wrong sometimes, but you're not so this time."

Armfield forgot all the beautiful women pining for him in London, forgot his importance as a magistrate of the county, and tried to catch Catherine in his arms with all the ardour of a man of twenty-five; but Catherine

evaded him, and, with a laugh, stepped out on the grass in sight of the rest of the guests. Armfield was forced to follow, and she took his arm again quietly.

"You little demon!" he whispered amorously.

They walked round, so as to come towards Clifford and Nora. Catherine's head was full of plans; a grand scheme was unfolding itself to her.

Nora had talked on about Allan as long as she could; she liked to hear Guy speak of him. She began to feel some attraction in this man, who was such a friend of Allan's; but, fearful of dwelling too long on this topic, she talked of the people who passed by, and speculated laughingly about their future lives.

"You seem interested in every one's story," Clifford said, "but you say no word of your own hopes. Will you never tell? May no one ever guess?"

He had been beside her for so long, he must speak of her, look at her, till she knew his love. She must know his love. Surely she knew it now, as his strong hand trembled as it crept close to hers, and his brave, manly

heart throbbed with desire and dread as it had never done before!

Nora flushed. She was afraid that Clifford suspected her secret.

"My own hopes? I have none, or not any I can think of at present."

She looked anxiously at Clifford, to read in his face if he had guessed. At this moment Catherine came close to them, and spoke to Clifford; and the latter, vexed, pained, feeling his passionate love cut off from all expression by Nora's unconscious indifference, turned to Catherine with a laugh, and claimed her hand for a dance, muttering, as he did so, a compliment such as was ever ready when he spoke to a woman, and giving her his usual bright, careless homage, which was always too near his eyes and lips to come from his heart.

Nora was alone again. She looked round to watch Allan; it was a pleasure to her, but she could not see him. Presently she heard his voice; it came from the walk behind the trees.

"My dear Evelyn," he was saying, "I never could be jealous of you. I trust you,

or I break with you. If you are not worthy my trust, you are not worthy my love."

How noble Allan's words sounded to Nora! She listened, with a swelling heart, scarce knowing that she listened.

"Any one that is really in love is always jealous," Evelyn responded. "How can you feel secure and quiet and satisfied about what you prize very, very much? You must be afraid and anxious, lest you lose it. Other people have been jealous of me, who loved me," she added, poutingly.

"I can't be. I believe in you, darling. And, Evelyn, I think it is foolish not to be open about our engagement before I go away to Italy; for we are engaged, you know."

"No, no, no; I don't want to be gossipped about and congratulated and worried; and I don't know why you are going away at all. You had much better stay, and go into the Church, and we'll be married much sooner. I might never live till you come back."

"Even in jest, don't say these things, Evelyn."

Allan's voice was stern from pain. He was silent for a moment; then he burst out

suddenly, in a tone which thrilled through Nora, and made her feel guilty and dishonourable in having overheard his words—

"Oh, my love, my love, my darling, you don't know what you are to me!"

Nora fled from the place where she had stood. She must go back to her own little room, to her books. She had no place out there, amongst those who wandered about under the trees, talking of love, or who were dancing merrily in the moonlight.

As she entered the house, she met Catherine coming out hurriedly.

"Will you go to aunt?" she said quickly; "she is ill. Of course it is nothing of consequence. Don't say anything about it, or it will drive the guests away. It is so provoking she should be ill just now. I'll send Dr. Holt to her."

Nora ran upstairs. The servants were gathered round Miss Dixon, who was lying on the floor in all her festal finery. They lifted her on her bed; they unfastened her clothes. Then the doctor came, but what could he do? In ten minutes the poor pompous soul had gone. Her magnificent

attire, her successful party, the marked attentions of the squire to her favourite niece—all this had perhaps excited her, and caused a rush of blood to her head; and there she lay now, with her interest in the world's vanities at an end for ever.

Through the window came the sound of the band and of laughing voices. Dr. Holt looked at Nora.

"We must send the people away," he said. "This is very sad. Your sister wished me to say nothing of her poor aunt's illness; but now it would be indecent to let the party go on. Shall I tell them?"

Nora did not answer. She was thinking how ghastly it was to die thus unmourned. She was thinking of the value of gewgaws and the value of human love. She was thinking of her father's death, then of her own, and realizing the moment of time towards which she was marching, which would make her even as this poor body.

"Shall I tell them?" the doctor repeated.

Nora raised her eyes.

"They don't disturb *her*," she said, "and they don't care. What does it matter? But

take your daughter away at once," she added. "She is so delicate; it might give her a shock to know this; it might make her ill."

The doctor went. He found the party breaking up, for the news had spread that Miss Dixon was ill. In the conservatory, Clifford was whispering to Catherine, with his arm round her waist; in the porch, Evelyn was telling Allan to come often, and see her before he went away, but he must remember all she had said, and not tease her; the musicians were getting rapidly drunk, with the assistance of the gardener, who availed himself of his new office of butler; some of the guests were looking for Miss Dixon to say good-night; some were asking anxiously if her illness were infectious; some were commenting on the sudden break up, and not quite understanding it; while Miss Dixon for the first time was indifferent to the praise or blame of her fellow-creatures.

Catherine remained in the conservatory after the guests had gone. She was satisfied with herself to-night. Yes, she thought, the squire would marry her; but there were difficulties. She was not rich, and Nora was a disadvantage

to any one. The squire had said to her to-night, that Miss Dixon ought to keep Nora in some control, as she would probably go to the mischief, and disgrace them all if left to herself. He had told Catherine, too, that there was nothing like good birth, and that a man was a fool who made a *mésalliance.*

She walked to and fro in the conservatory, broke off some lilies, and crushed them in her fingers. She was excited. The warmth of Clifford's manner had roused strange feelings in her breast. She began to ask herself if she really loved Clifford.

Meanwhile, Nora was searching for Catherine in every place. She came at last to the conservatory, and found her.

"Do you know what has happened, Catherine?" she asked, and her voice was gentle, for she really thought it would be a shock to her step-sister to know that Miss Dixon was dead.

"Aunt is ill," she answered sharply; "I told you that myself. I hope you have done everything she wanted."

"Miss Dixon wants nothing done for her any more, for she is dead."

"Don't be a fool!" Catherine answered, seizing Nora's wrist. "How dare you say such a thing?"

Then she brushed past her, and walked upstairs.

Nora let her go. She heard her noisy entry into the dead woman's room; then there was silence. Still thinking that perhaps there was a tender spot in Catherine's heart, which might ache at the sad sight which would greet her, and drawn by sympathy with pain, Nora, after a few minutes, followed slowly. When she reached the door of Miss Dixon's room, she heard the noise of some one shutting and locking the drawers and cupboards within. A moment more, and Catherine walked out, closed the bedroom door after her, and locked it.

"It is right," she said, "that every place should be locked, and that I should keep the keys. My poor aunt's death is very sudden and very sad. I will send for Mr. Moore. You should have prepared me a little; every one is not as heartless as you are."

Catherine went downstairs, and wrote to the Rev. Simeon, requesting him to come to her at this sad juncture, as she had no one to

rely on, and she much desired his comfort and counsel. Having sent this letter, she thought of the future. She knew that all her father had possessed was to be equally divided between herself and Nora after Miss Dixon's death, and, of course, they would be free to sell The Dell or to live there together. In a few days Nora might leave her, lead what life she chose, see Clifford whenever she liked, unobserved, unthwarted. Miss Dixon's small fortune, which Catherine knew would be entirely hers, would not suffice to buy Nora's interest in The Dell, and also keep up the house and grounds. If Nora insisted on leaving The Dell, their position in the neighbourhood would be lost. Nora must not go, must not be independent. Only a few hours ago Catherine had made plans, had resolved to make use of Nora to discover through her this secret of Guy Clifford's. Catherine did not mean to communicate it to Armfield, unless it suited her to do so; to-night she only desired the knowledge so as to gain an influence over Clifford. Why should Nora know anything about him of which she, Catherine, was ignorant? If The Dell were sold, and Nora

went away, all Catherine's schemes might come to nothing. She hated Nora; she liked to be overbearing and insolent to her; but she recognized to-night that she must be propitiatory.

Well, she thought, what did it matter? If she were seemingly amiable to Nora now, it would make Nora's final discomfiture all the more delightful. The Dell must be kept; they must continue to live there. What would be Miss Severne's position, living in lodgings in the village?

In the midst of these thoughts Catherine remembered how late it was. A sudden chill of fear seized her—the cowardly panic of a nature that only dares for mean ends and selfish aims. Upstairs lay a dead body; Catherine, in going to bed, must pass the room where it lay. The house was very still, and outside the howling of a dog broke the quiet of the night. Why should she endure this nervousness, this discomfort, when it could be avoided? Glancing quickly round with scared eyes, Catherine rang the bell violently. As it was not at once answered, she rang again and again with anger at the delay. At last a tired maid appeared.

"It was extremely inconsiderate of you," Catherine said, "to go to your bed till you were sure I should not require you any more. I am much too upset and nervous, from my dear aunt's sad death, to be left alone to-night, so please come with me to my room. You can light a fire there, as it is cold, and sit up with me till I fall asleep."

Thus protected from her fears, Catherine went to bed; but her sleep was not peaceful, for she was haunted by the thought of Nora's possible opposition to her schemes and their consequent failure.

CHAPTER III.

A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING.

THE funeral was over, and the will had been read by the village solicitor. In nasal tones and legal terms he had droned out that Barbara Dixon, spinster, had left all her possessions to her niece, Catherine Severne. After this, he read the will of the late Walter Severne, by which it was provided that, at the death of Miss Dixon, the two girls should inherit equally The Dell and all their father's property, with the exception of his books, which were a separate bequest to Nora. Catherine and Nora were given the power to sell The Dell, and divide the proceeds, or to live there together.

After this nasal lecture was over, at which the Rev. Simeon Moore assisted, for obvious

reasons, they all adjourned to the dining-room, and lunched, Catherine taking the head of the table, and assuming at once the position of mistress of the house.

Catherine had been for many years acquainted with the particulars of her father's will; Nora had perhaps heard it, but had been too young to understand or to think on such subjects, therefore to the latter these last wishes of her father came as for the first time, and the loving thoughtfulness which had given all his much-prized books to his pet daughter stirred Nora's heart, recalled vividly the tender love and companionship which had glorified her childish days, and made her, throughout this dreary feast of death, entirely silent.

When the solicitor and the parson had departed, having fulfilled their respective duties to their entire satisfaction, Catherine begged Nora to come and talk to her in the drawing-room. The two girls faced each other silently for a few minutes. The tie which bound their lives together, and made them act with some reference to a common end, was broken, and neither knew how the other would now form her life. Catherine spoke first.

"Won't you sit down, Nora? It is so dull, and I want to talk to you."

Nora sat down without speaking.

"We are alone in the world now," Catherine continued, "and I hope we shall get on together."

She watched Nora's face anxiously. The latter answered abruptly—

"I don't see why we should get on at all, or better than we have done. There is now no reason for making the attempt."

Nora's old smile was on her lips. Catherine's wish seemed ridiculous.

"We are sisters, Nora, after all; and why should we not be friendly for the sake of those that are gone?"

Catherine raised her handkerchief to her eyes. It was not feigned emotion; she was thinking of many things that were included in the loss of her aunt. Nora kept her eyes very steadily fixed on Catherine for a few moments.

"What is all this for? Why do you not say what it is you want? You know that I don't like you, Catherine; but I have no stupid spite against you, and it really does not give

me any pleasure to annoy you. What is it you want?"

"You are so abrupt; no one can talk to you. Everything has been left between us, except my aunt's little fortune, which, of course, is mine."

She drew herself up with an air of having by noble acts deserved this slight reward.

"Of course," Nora remarked simply.

"You cannot have any ill-will about that, for you know you never did anything for dear aunt, never were commonly gracious to her."

"Do go on," Nora said in a tone of irritation.

Catherine's eyes flashed.

"Well, what are you going to do? We must come to some arrangement about this house."

Her tone was much brisker now that anger had taken the place of sentiment.

"I should like to leave it."

"Sell the place?"

"Yes."

"And we are to lose the position we have always held in the country, go into dirty lodgings in the village, and create a scandal by living separately! Have you no respect for

your father's memory? Do you never consider what he would think?"

Nora smiled.

"My poor little father! He was always trying to escape from what you call 'a position.' I think being driven into 'a position' was what killed him—poor little father!"

"Have you no respect for appearances; no regard for what people say of you?"

"I think not. When people say silly things they worry me; but they don't prevent me doing what I want to do."

"Then you live for yourself, and study your own pleasure entirely."

"You began by being very amiable, Catherine, now you fly to the other extreme. You are not judicious! Why should you not buy my share in this house, and live here, and keep up all the dignity of the family? Dignity for two must be much more imposing than dignity for one."

"Don't be a fool, Nora. How can I buy your share in the house? What should I live on afterwards? It's all very well for you; but I like to dress like a lady, and look like a lady, and that takes money."

"Specially the latter," Nora put in.

"Living in fishermen's huts," Catherine continued, "and making nets, and going in boats at all hours may suit you; but I never had a taste for low society, and, if I live with my equals, I must do as they do."

"And to enable you to live with your equals, what is it you want me to do?"

"To stay here and keep up our home, and avoid the scandal of quarrelling and parting."

"We could not quarrel, if we parted."

"We should look as if we had fought."

"We are more likely to quarrel if we live together."

"No one need know it. It does a girl a lot of harm, if it is supposed she has a bad temper."

"All the eligible partners hold off in dread of a black eye!"

"How can you laugh and joke at a time like this?"

"Well, if I stay here," Nora continued, "and help you to keep up your dignity, I'm afraid I shall be so poor *I* shall not be able to mix with *my* equals."

"What do you mean?"

"Stay a minute; let me think."

Nora sat very quiet, her chin on her hand.

Catherine fidgeted and smoothed out her crape.

Nora looked up after a little while.

"Listen, Catherine; I don't like to live with you; I don't like this house, except one room; but still I'll stay. I'll give you three quarters of my income; I'll keep the library for my sitting-room; but there must be no interference with me. You can entertain your equals; but if I choose to ask all the fishermen in the village, or the witches off the moor, there must be no complaint."

"You'll not disgrace the house!"

"I don't know. We'll never come to any understanding about terms."

"Terms! you've just said what you'll give."

Nora laughed.

"I was not talking of money this time. I am not going to be a hypocrite," she added, "and say I do this entirely to please you. I have an affection for the old library, where I can remember my happiest days. I think I am making a mistake in living with you; we are not suited to be together. I've no doubt we

are both very admirable in our own ways, but our ways are somewhat different."

"There is one thing, Nora, if we live here, there can be but one mistress. Who is to be that mistress?

"Who is to order the dinners and scold the servants, and be generally disliked? You, if you fancy it; but in my own magnificent suite of rooms I shall reign supreme, please. The library opens on the garden, so I can even have my own entrance."

Nora laughed, and a very unpleasant expression came in Catherine's eyes. She felt that Nora saw through her affectation of sorrow for Miss Dixon; saw through her affectation of kindliness towards herself; and yet, as Catherine was forced to ask Nora to live at The Dell, she was forced to assume a friendliness which was not believed in. She hated Nora for being too intelligent to be deceived; and she was glad to have carried her point to-day, not only and not chiefly because it added to her personal comfort, but because she was sure, if Nora lived under the same roof with her, the day for retaliation would certainly come.

"I am much obliged," Catherine said stiffly,

"for your agreeing to the arrangements I wish; but I must say, Nora, that it would be better taste not to parade your indifference to my poor aunt, by making a joke of everything on the day of her funeral."

Then with a pomposity which was perhaps in memoriam—a tribute to the departed—she walked out of the room.

The smile faded from Nora's lips.

"Of all untruths, a pretence of grief is the most revolting," thought Nora; "and I'll tear it to tatters whenever I see it. But, oh! death is solemn, were it the most pitiable wretch on God's earth that died. Gone, gone, even as I shall go; but where?"

Nora thought of the love Miss Dixon had given to Catherine, of the pride she had taken in her beauty; thought how, for Catherine's sake, Miss Dixon had even buried her own silly self-importance, and had forgotten her selfishness; and yet the love which had been the one beauty of the life now gone, could not win an honest tear from the girl she had petted and indulged. The assumed sorrow was for edification of the living, not for mourning for the dead.

Nora was learning the bitterness of life in many ways. She had the misfortune to think of things as they are, not as they seem.

With a heart that was heavy from solemn thoughts, Nora gathered some autumn flowers, and stole to the churchyard; and the only hand that laid the sweet jessamine and roses on the new-made grave, was the hand that had never been cherished by the poor body that lay beneath.

CHAPTER IV.

BITTERLY BELOVED.

A WEEK had passed since Miss Dixon's funeral. It was the day before Allan Moore was to leave for Italy. He was to live in Rome for three months. He had slightly hinted to his father that he could not yet decide upon his future career; but this hint the wily parson tacitly refused to accept. He spoke of Allan's entering the Church as a certainty in the future, and made much of his own kindness and indulgence in permitting him to travel a little before beginning his life seriously; and it became generally understood that this self-denying minister of the gospel had deprived himself of many luxuries in order to furnish his son with means to live in Rome.

Allan's love for Evelyn considerably strengthened his desire to be an artist. Love,

such as his, was an inspiration, filled him with more imagination, more power; his love and his art seemed almost one. His thoughts glowed with new beauty; he would be great for her sake, he would prove to her that love had fired him with genius. Yet Evelyn, who had unconsciously developed his art worship, secretly scorned the idea of his being an artist; and her ambition for the man who was her present toy, was that he should become a bishop and live in a palace.

Allan was packing some of his drawings and pictures when he heard Nora call him. He dropped the ladder, and she came up. She was always a welcome guest at the studio now, for Allan had grown fond of her. Latterly, he recognized, without any words from Nora, that she understood his aims and much in his love for his art of which he had never spoken to any one; but not once did it cross his mind that there was in Nora's heart any warmer beat for him than that of mere friendship.

"You are a good sister to come," he said. "I was just thinking of you. I've not had a talk with you for a long time."

She looked grave, she looked agitated for a

moment, then seemed to thrust her nervousness away as something too cowardly to yield to.

"I've come to tell you," she said bravely, "that at the dance at The Dell I overheard you and Evelyn talking to one another, and saying things which certainly were not meant for me to hear. Please forgive me. Allan, of course I know you are engaged to one another; I guessed it long ago."

Allan flushed like a girl.

"Yes," he said, "we are engaged; but Evelyn does not wish it known."

"The secret is safe enough with me. What does it matter that I should know? My knowing does not alter things."

"No," said Allan, after a moment's silence, "and I think I am glad you know; there will be some one to whom Evelyn can speak, some one who can tell me of Evelyn. If she were to fall ill when I am away, there would be no one to tell me unless you were to write. This is very selfish of me, Nora," he continued; "but won't you forgive me? I love this girl so dearly, my life is bound to hers. If ever I should do anything worthy of praise, it will be my love for her which will do it."

He raised his eyes with a glow of pride in his love.

Nora's eyes were fixed on the ground. Her thoughts had gone back to the summer's night on board the cutter, when the moonlight had been more beautiful than it could ever be again, when the waves lazily rocked the ship, and life changed suddenly, and was made glorious by hope; they had gone back to that hour when she had unconsciously loved this man who now stood here, telling her of his love for Evelyn.

He had taken her hand as he spoke. Why did he take it and hold it so tenderly? Did he think that her heart lay dead within her; that she, a young girl, could share his secrets, sympathize with his work, be near him and understand his every look, and yet not love him? She could have flung his hand away, and have rushed from his presence in the tumult of her heart; but she was only silent for a minute, and then said—

"You must tell Evelyn that I know. I hope she won't be vexed. Do you want me to write to you about her while you are away?" she added.

"Will you?" he answered eagerly. "I

should like you to tell me how she looks, what she does—to tell me every little trifle which, perhaps, she will not tell me herself."

"Will you trust me?" Nora said. "It is rather risky. I might be tempted to play tricks. I'm an unbeliever, you know, and a scoffing tongue takes the beauty from love; and a mocking laugh makes things seem ridiculous sometimes."

"I'm not afraid of you. You love too strongly all that is beautiful in the world of thought not to be noble yourself; and as to your unbelief, it's a pretence. I can laugh, too," he added. "I'm not a sentimental fool; but some things lie too deep for mockery to touch."

"You will tell me of Rome, and your life there, of the impression that everything makes on you," Nora said quickly.

She could not stand there for ever listening to his love for Evelyn. When he talked of his art, of his hopes and enthusiasms, it was possible to forget herself.

"Yes; you know every place so well, where every statue, every picture is, and have such clear feeling as to all you would like best in

Rome, that it will almost seem as if you were with me."

"You'll come back sure of yourself, you'll devote yourself to your work, you'll design and carry out pictures, you'll grow old creating beautiful things. An artist's life," Nora continued, walking to and fro in the studio, "seems to me a glorious life—to dream of beautiful things, then to express them with ever increasing skill, to study other men's minds all the while, so that the world grows wider and wider, the soul expands, and all human creatures are interesting, because your mind is too big to be irritated by their meannesses, or shocked by their vices."

"Nora," Allan said, leaving off his packing, and stopping her in her restless walk by laying his hand on her shoulder, "where have you learnt all this? What makes you so unlike the people with whom you live?"

"When I was little, I think I began to learn from looking at my father's face; and then, as one must have some company, when he was gone I sought the company that seemed to satisfy him, and so for many years I've lived with old, old people, some of them centuries

old, and that's what makes me so wise and sedate!"

"What are you going to do with your learning and thought?"

"Nothing; women seldom do anything. I may make a greater muddle of my life than other people; it's very probable. I am going to have a class of dirty little boys and girls in the village, and teach them some things that won't be the least use to them. It would not be fun to teach them what they *must* know; they'll learn that somehow."

"You ought to be an artist, Nora—a writer. I'd like to see you working, and to watch your progress while you watch mine. You can't go on reading, reading, acquiring always, without any expression. It's unhealthy; it will make your life unnatural—will perhaps turn you into a satirist, and make everything bitter to you."

"If I wrote, I should shock people; I could not refrain from saying what my brain thought. I could not stop and think that I must tone down this or leave out that, lest people should not like it. If I were great and strong, I suppose I could say anything; but as I am not so, I'll be silent."

"How rightly you judge, Nora!" A glow of earnestness kindled his face as he spoke. "We must be fearless in art, if we would be great. There is no mystery of passion which we may not touch in life or art. If the roots of thought be pure, the handling will be pure, and will look so to all but those who defile it by their minds' coarseness. When we shrink, we had best withdraw utterly; the shrinking means a thought that is weak or base; we are not fit for the work. In life and art the body must be transfigured by the soul to be glorious in its nakedness."

Nora watched him. His blue eyes were dilated, and the expressive movement of his lips gave more than ordinary beauty to his words. Her soul felt near to his, claimed his. She could help him as Evelyn never could. She felt strong to bear anything for his sake, and to keep him, by her courage, unflinchingly to the ideal of life, which the pure ardour of youth and intellect had conceived. Was not all the beauty of life involved in faithfulness to the first pure dream; all the degradation of life involved in the gradual relinquishment of that dream from sordid cares and expediency?

They stood silently, these two yóung souls, full of ardour, full of hope, scorning in the strength of their faith the world's philosophy, while in the darkness of the unseen future fate laughed and mocked. At last, for Nora the silence grew painful. She turned to Allan.

"I'm interrupting your packing, and you have not much time; I must be off. I promised to go to old Jos; he is ailing, and likes to see me. He has become reconciled to the care of a woman."

"Promise me before you go to be often with Evelyn, and to tell me all about her. She has no companion, and she likes you."

"You wish it?" she asked, with a sudden flash in her eyes.

"Yes, very much."

"Then I'll see her whenever she likes; but we are not suited to one another, and Evelyn will never care for me."

"Well, you'll be kind to her. I like to think I've trusted her to you, as it were. Shall I see you again before I go?" he asked, as he took her hand.

"I think not."

"We've had really good times together, Nora. You're true and good, every bit of you; and, honestly, one of my chief pleasures is our friendship."

She had no word to say. How could she speak? It was no calm friendship which made her heart beat and her hand turn cold in his, no calm friendship which made her almost cry aloud for his love.

Allan stooped to kiss her. It seemed to him quite simple that he should kiss her at parting. She raised her head, and their lips met. Perhaps some knowledge came from the touch of her lips, for Allan said suddenly—

"I wonder why you look so sad, Nora. Is anything wrong? Can I help you in any way?"

"Do I look sad?" she said, and laughed. "I don't know why I should. I am glad you should live in Rome and work. Everything is going smoothly for me. I have not fought with Catherine lately, nor have I been specially depressed by my own ignorance and stupidity the last few days! Well, good-bye," she added. "I'll write to you, and tell you everything."

Then, with a smile, she kissed him again, and went.

Nora walked fast to Wreck Cottage; the physical action was bracing. Why should she fret? It could not be helped; she could not change, and he could not change. She hoped Allan would be a great artist; but she did not feel sure, if things went wrong with him, that genius was strong enough in Allan to make him hold to his art right through everything. And Evelyn? She could not strengthen his heart or his hand.

Nora felt confident of her own power to help Allan. Will devotion, understanding, intellect, all brought to bear on a loved life, change anything of original character? Is it all waste? What is the influence of soul on soul? Can the question never be answered?

"Yes," said old Jos, in reply to Nora's inquiries. "I'm like Caliban, side stitches pen my breath up; but don't recommend me lotions and medicines and nonsense. It's age and the cold weather. By-and-by I'll get out again; and a hard day's work will warm my blood and keep life in me a bit longer, but it's nearly time I was paid off."

Then, looking at Nora as she took down a book and turned the leaves over listlessly, he said—

"Something amiss with you, lass? Never say die. Do you expect things to go as you like? Lord, what a fool you must be!"

"And am I never to want things for myself—never?" she burst out impetuously. "Am I always to see others get them, and to laugh and be glad?"

"Yes. Don't think of yourself at all. Go straight ahead, and do your work, and don't be so weak as to look out for happiness, and what you are pleased to think are your dues. How do you know what are you dues, or any one's? Keep your compassion and your tenderness, and all that sort of thing, for others, and not for yourself. Good Lord! fancy sitting down to cry over oneself!"

Old Jos laughed till his laughing brought back the stitches in his side; at last he stopped. Then Nora brought the "Æneid," and soon they were entirely occupied with Ulysses, and had forgotten Cairn Cove and its inhabitants.

Suddenly just at the door there were foot-

steps and angry voices. Old Jos bent his head forward and listened.

"Here, lass," he said quickly, "you don't mind my locking you up for a bit? I don't want these men to see you; they are not quite so sober as they might be."

In an instant he thrust Nora into the inner room, and locked the door on her.

Clifford and Smashing Jack burst rather noisily into the cottage.

"Bless you, you need not make such a row," old Jos sang out to them.

Smashing Jack's brows were lowered, his eyelids were swelled, and his bloodshot eyes looked out with a brutal glance; his lips were set sullenly, and all his features had a fixed downward curve of dogged animal rage. Clifford's head was lifted, and his eyes seemed on fire, while the lines of his lips were mocking and defiant. It was strange to see the different expression which anger took in the two men.

"Am I master or not?" Clifford said; and his words had that ring of decision and iron will which needs no raising of the voice to give them strength.

He addressed Smashing Jack. Neither of the men paid the slightest heed to old Jos.

"You're not master of a smuggling cutter, by ——," Smashing Jack burst out, "but of a cowardly trader! Why don't you ship double the cargo of brandy and tobacco? You've sale enough for it here. There's not a man in the village would split on you; and if they did, we'd run the *Sunlight* all the same. I didn't join the ship's crew to waste my life like this, and save a few niggardly pence and my own skin!"

Clifford's eyes flamed.

"You joined the *Sunlight* to obey orders, and, by God! you'll do it. If you were on board to-night, you'd be in irons. Luckily for you, you're on shore."

"Look here," he answered, drawing very close to Clifford, and speaking to him with his face within a few inches of Guy's, his whole attitude expressive of fierce brutality, "I don't say you want pluck—it isn't that—but you won't let us men make our fortunes. Shall I tell you why? You want to play the fine gentleman, to have more money than we have, that you may seduce our wives and our sweet-

hearts; and to have your damned way, you keep the *Sunlight* little better than a beggarly trader!"

A slight expression of disgust was on Clifford's face, as if the near approach of this man were unpleasant to him.

"The cutter sails to-morrow at noon. You can join, you can desert; or, if it pleases you better, you can turn informer. You are one of my best sailors, and I'd be sorry to lose you; but I'd see twenty of you to hell before I'd yield to insolence and insubordination!"

The clenched fist of Smashing Jack moved, as if about to justify his name; but Clifford's unflinching gaze cowed him, and his hand fell to his side.

"And now," said Clifford quickly, "I've had enough of you. This is Mr. Thornton's house, and you'll go."

Smashing Jack stood quite still for a minute.

"Yes, I'll go," he said at length; "but" (here he swore a coarse oath) "we'll see who's master some day."

Then, with the same sullen glare in his eyes, he turned and went.

Clifford smiled.

Old Jos rose, opened the door of the inner room without a word, and Nora came out. She looked at Clifford. His eyes were still aflame. She could not help admiring the fearless strength that was in his face. He started when he saw Nora, and turned to Thornton.

"What's the meaning of this?" he said quickly. "Why did you let Miss Severne listen to coarse language and violence?"

"Could I help it? Could I let the lass be seen by that brute?"

"Well, Jos, this is no place for her. You should not allow Miss Severne to come at this hour and run such risks."

"Should I not? What harm will it do her? It's true she knows you're a smuggler, and it was not quite your intention to take her into the secret."

Thornton smiled.

"Does it matter that I know?" Nora said, looking at Clifford. "Am I not to be trusted, because I'm a woman?"

"It was not that I meant," Clifford answered impatiently. "Do you think I could distrust you or mind your knowing? I am annoyed

that you should have overheard conversation like ours; I am annoyed that you should be troubled with a secret which perhaps you would rather not know—that's all. If you think worse of me for being a smuggler, I can't help it," he added. "That's what I am, and what I mean to be; and I don't want any mortal man or woman to like me, if they think me a weak, respectable idiot, hampered with other men's notions, and at the bidding of fools."

Nora laughed.

"Why should I think worse of you because you're a smuggler? I don't like people for this or that which they do, but for themselves."

The angry, defiant expression was passing out of Guy's face.

"But that man," Nora continued, "he hates you; he is a dangerous enemy."

"I told Master Clifford long ago," said Thornton, "not to take the man in his crew. I knew what he was."

Clifford smiled.

"You seem not to care," said Nora. "Why did you take him? Why do you keep him?"

"I admire the fellow in a sort of way. His physical strength is wonderful, he's a capital sailor; and, to tell you the truth, there's a certain pleasure in mastering him. He'll join to-morrow."

"Well, mark my words, lad," said old Jos, "he'll bide his time; but he'll never forget, and he'll play you an ugly trick yet."

"Jos, you're an old blockhead!" said Clifford, laughing.

His wrath had all vanished, and he had the same careless, happy expression as ever.

Standing there in the firelight, Thornton's eyes rested on him with delight. His handsome face and clear blue eyes, so strangely transparent that they seemed like windows, through which to look, the youth and vigour, which showed in every line of his comely frame, all pleased the old man.

"What a fool I am," he thought, "to love the lad! He'll come to no good; too brave, too reckless, too true-hearted, not to come to grief."

Clifford had turned to Nora.

"I am so sorry," he said gently. "It was stupid of me to let that sailor come up here;

but I did not think of your being at Wreck Cottage. I'm a rough fellow and a good-for-nothing scamp; but I am more sorry than I can tell you, that your ears should be defiled by an evil word."

"My ears are not defiled nor my thoughts either," she said, smiling, "because there are men who curse and hate. I'm not a child; I must think; I must know. I am not a drawing-room young lady. I think it's rather an insult," she added, with a little laugh, "to suppose that if I know of the vices and passions of men it can hurt me."

"Bravo!" said Thornton. "That's the way to answer him. He's like all the rest—he has no sense. He thinks it's reverencing a woman to shut her up in a box and make a hysterical fool of her."

Clifford shook his head.

"No, Jos, you're wrong, and you know nothing about it; but I'll take Miss Severne home now, away from your bad influence, and as I sail to-morrow there is no chance of her being annoyed for some time."

Clifford was rather silent for a while; he was wondering what Nora thought of Smashing

Jack's accusation against him. He would have liked to tell Nora it was a lie; but how could he? At last, in despair, he talked of Allan; it was a safe subject.

"He has never told me," he said, "that he is engaged to Evelyn Holt; but I feel sure of it. I am also sure that the little fool will play him false."

"Why should you think so?" Nora asked.

"Some men notice little ways, little looks, and judge from them. I could not tell you exactly my reasons, but I feel sure of it, and I am heartily glad he is going away for a while. Perhaps it will cool his ardour; another thing, it will give her a chance of forgetting him if she is that way inclined."

Nora was silent. Was it possible that Evelyn did not prize the true love which was given to her; that she did not value it above all things?

Nora walked on for some time without speaking, then Clifford roused her from her reverie.

"I'll be away for a couple of months, perhaps more. Will you give me a thought sometimes?"

He spoke very gently. Nora looked up in a surprised way, as if she did not quite understand.

"It's a superstitious fancy, perhaps," he continued, hesitatingly, "but a sailor likes to think that some good woman's thoughts follow him on the waves. And, Nora," he said, with growing passion in his voice, "there is no woman like you, with your great, brave, true heart. God! I'd give my life for your love, but I know—I know!" He raised his hand as if to stop her speaking. "I only ask for a thought now and then."

Nora was going to say some weak word, but he would not let the word come.

"I am no coward," he said rapidly; "I've faced death and danger, and have stood my ground with the bravest; but I cannot stand here to-night and hear you say you don't care, that I'm no more to you than any other man. I cannot, Nora, I cannot."

He turned away and left her alone in the darkness. It was thus that Clifford told his love.

It was but a little way home. Nora walked on in confusion of thought.

Did Guy Clifford really love her? How suddenly his gay, careless manner had changed! Surely that tone in his strong voice, which silenced her so strangely, could not be feigned? Yet she remembered the words she had overheard, remembered and doubted.

CHAPTER V.

A GLIMPSE OF CHARACTER.

FROM the day of Miss Dixon's funeral, Nora felt conscious of being watched. She was less with Catherine than formerly, and yet Catherine's presence haunted her. Unexpectedly Catherine would appear at the library window to ask some trivial question; unexpectedly, when Nora walked out at dusk, she would come upon Catherine; at meals, some word of Catherine's would show that she knew where Nora had been and whom she had spoken to. This began to grow unpleasant to Nora. She asked herself why it was that Catherine watched, and finding no answer in her imagination, she asked Catherine.

Her step-sister laughed.

"What a very strange notion!" she said. "Why should I watch you? There must be

some mystery in your life, some secret, if you fancy you are watched."

Then she laughed again.

"You do watch me. It can do you no good, and it annoys me."

Catherine's merriment increased.

"I can't help laughing," she said at length, "at this silly fancy of yours. I know what you do, where you go. Your visits to Wreck Cottage, your benevolent instruction to the fishermen's children, are not romantic events which excite my curiosity. I've no reason to play the detective."

"Perhaps not," said Nora quietly.

"I hear you are going to be married to Guy Clifford," Catherine added. "Is this your secret which you fear I should discover?"

Nora flushed.

"It is untrue," she said sharply. "There are no grounds for such a report."

"It's foolish to be indignant. You see those innocent little meetings of yours at Wreck Cottage, those dusky walks, have their significance to uncultivated villagers, who judge by appearances. Besides, it's just possible that Clifford himself may have given reason for the

report. A conscious laugh, a shrug of the shoulders, when he was chaffed about you, may mean a good deal; and it's hard for a man like Guy Clifford to deny a conquest."

"Guy Clifford is a gentleman," said Nora severely, "though I am not in love with him nor he with me."

"But you don't mind these reports, do you?" said Catherine, with another laugh. "You always scorn gossip."

"I ought to scorn it. I am foolish enough to be annoyed for a moment."

"They say many things about Captain Clifford," Catherine continued, keeping her eyes with an unpleasant steadfastness on Nora.

The latter was nervous, was afraid of betraying Guy's secrets by any change of colour or manner. She got up and stood by the fire. Catherine noticed the movement and smiled.

"Perhaps it is no secret to you, perhaps you know what other people only suspect, that Captain Clifford is a smuggler?"

The departure of Allan, the constant sensation of living with a spy, the increasing feebleness of old Jos, all these things had strained Nora's nerves. She felt, for an instant, at

Catherine's mercy, and that it was impossible not to betray herself. Only for an instant did this weakness last. She turned towards Catherine suddenly and answered her laugh with one as careless.

"That's really better than the first report! But I'm afraid it's as untrue. At any rate, he has kept it a secret from the woman whom you say he is going to marry."

"It's just the profession you would admire," said Catherine, baffled by Nora's manner more than by her words. "With your delightfully liberal notions of right and wrong, a smuggler would, no doubt, be a hero in your eyes."

"Certainly. If you find that Guy Clifford is a smuggler and prove it to me, I'll fall in love with him at once. Will that satisfy you?"

Catherine felt that Nora defied her, saw it in the flash of her eyes and in the little flush on her cheek, and she resolved not to be vanquished. She had not learnt anything from Nora, but she was glad that her watchfulness was making Nora uncomfortable.

These meetings at Wreck Cottage exasperated Catherine. She could not stop them,

neither could she be present at them; whatever their import she was absolutely ignorant about them, and likely to remain so. Clifford always paid her a laughing homage, always seemed fascinated by her; but how much of this was serious? Clifford should learn some day that she was not a woman to play with. The game would be dangerous if his heart were not in it. Catherine decided that nothing could be learnt from Nora, who was steeled against her; more might be learnt from Clifford himself, and from others. Full well Catherine knew that Clifford loved women's society, and was not too fastidious as to the class in which he enjoyed it. Perhaps at Cairn Cove there might be some woman who had taken his courtship seriously, and had been fool enough to love him; if so, it might not be pleasant to her to hear that Clifford was to marry Nora. Catherine thought she would spread the report a little, just to see what came of it. Women in love are argus-eyed and seek revenge if scorned, particularly the class of women who probably had been the object of Clifford's attention in the village or thereabouts.

Catherine thought she would, like Nora,

penetrate into a lower strata of society than her own. Life was interesting to Catherine. The squire was not entirely satisfactory; but she did not despair. Armfield Towers was the distant haven into which she hoped to run; but there was much sunshine and fair weather to be enjoyed before that. Catherine had not much book learning, but she was admirably self-taught, and could calculate many things with extraordinary accuracy. Her hopes of success with Trevor Armfield were based on her own skilful management. She knew her physical attractions were such as he admired, and her shrewdness more fascinating than any intellectual superiority; and, with a tact which was truly admirable, she made him feel the former to be just within his reach, and yet impossibly beyond it, and she made him take pleasure in her shrewdness as something pleasant, useful, rare in a woman. She forced Armfield to feel that she was more worth winning than a London belle, because more difficult to win, knowing that it was thus a man of his type measured the value of a woman. On the other hand, Catherine almost wooed Clifford, for she felt that his weak side

was the impossibility he found in being cruel to a woman.

Why are talents, such as Catherine Severne possessed, wasted on a woman dwelling by the rocks of Cornwall? They must exercise themselves; their very nature is one of aggressive activity.

From this day Nora never shook off the feeling that she was living with a spy. It seemed impossible to prove that she was watched. Could she have detected Catherine distinctly dodging her steps, or prying into her secrets, Nora would probably have parted from her at once; but this she was never able to do. Yet Catherine's field of observation seemed gradually to enlarge. She grew friendly with Evelyn Holt, was a good deal in the village, and had talked to two or three of the children whom Nora was teaching. The only place where Catherine could not penetrate was into Wreck Cottage. She had made the attempt, however, and failed, as old Jos told Nora chucklingly—

"I'm blessed," he said, "if that step-sister of yours didn't pay me a visit. I was dozing by the chimney-corner, with my pipe in my

mouth, listening to the roar of the waves and going off in a dream of my old sailoring days, when a knock came at the door, and in walked my lady! I could not believe my eyes at first; but as soon as I saw who it was I behaved like an old bear, and snarled at her. Could I tell her where her sister, Miss Nora, was? No, I couldn't. Miss Nora was a great friend of mine—wasn't she? Perhaps so. Was she very clever; did she know a great deal? If she could not find out that for herself, there was no use in my telling her. This remark of mine was a staggerer. My lady was quiet for a bit, then said she had heard that I was rough and rude, but that she believed it was only a pretence, and that I gave myself these manners for fun. Fun! I said; pretence! and I swore a big oath; oh, such a big oath! and said I hated the sight of a fine lady, and begged her to do me the favour to go away; said she had left the door open, and that the wind down my back was giving me the ague; and that my manners were a deal better than hers, for they didn't hurt any one. I think she had enough of it by that time, so she went away. I sat still in my chair the whole time, and was a

regular old brute; and I don't think she'll ever come again."

Nora was amused. She was glad that there was one place where she was safe from Catherine's surveillance. This day that Thornton had told Nora of Catherine's visit, they had not been studying much at Wreck Cottage; they had been gossiping about people, about Allan, about Clifford. Jos had been praising the latter in his own quaint way; and Nora had been amused by his remarks.

Faithful to her promise, Nora sought Evelyn's society, and honestly tried to like her, and find out all her best points. Evelyn loved to pour into Nora's ear her highly wrought and sentimental feelings, and found in talking to Nora an outlet for expressing the delightful opinion she had formed of herself. Love was one of her favourite topics of conversation; and Nora tried to be patient while Evelyn tenderly asked her views on some intricate points in connection with this passion.

To-day, after her gossiping talk with old Jos, Nora went to see Evelyn, and was less patient than usual when the latter grew confidentially romantic. Evelyn had just received

a letter from Allan, and seemed somewhat dissatisfied therewith.

"You seem to expect me to be overjoyed at hearing from him," she said; "but he talks of little else than this old ruin, and the other old picture. You know, I'm afraid, Nora"—here she laid her hand on Nora's arm, and looked at her pathetically—"he loves his art better than he loves me."

"And why should he not?" Nora asked impatiently. "It ought to be before everything, if he is to be great."

"I don't think so," Evelyn answered. "I don't care to be second in any man's thoughts."

"You would rather a man made a slave of himself for you? Fancy being jealous of a man's work!" she continued contemptuously. "Why, it's done for you; and it's better to occupy part of a great man's mind than the whole of a fool's!"

"And do you think Allan will be great?"

"How can I tell? I hope so."

"I think he ought never to have gone away. I don't mind saying to you, Nora, that it hurt me terribly that he should go away."

"Why?" said Nora, with astonishment.

"He could not have gone if he had loved me very, very much. I wished him to stay, and to go into the Church."

"You wished him to sacrifice everything for you, and to act against his nature!"

"Lovers sacrifice everything for one another," Evelyn said, pouring some perfume on her handkerchief, and putting it to her forehead with an air of sadness and exhaustion. "I have sacrificed everything for him. I might marry richer men—men in a better position than Allan."

"Do people count the cost when they love? I don't know much about these things."

Nora's lip curled a little.

"Oh, I'm not a humble creature, contented with anything. When I see that others would do anything in the wide world that I wish, it makes me fastidious."

Nora smiled. Evelyn seemed to wish her to think that hundreds of suitors were ready to give their life for her. Nora was about to try the effect of a little ridicule, when the door opened, and Mr. Armfield was announced. Nora did not know that Evelyn was acquainted with him, and she was so surprised

that she sat and stared—stared still more when Evelyn blushed delicately and her eyes lighted with pleasure. Was it the peculiarity of Evelyn's eyes, Nora thought, to look as though the person to whom she spoke were a divinity? Nora could not bear Armfield's presence; she could not stay in the room with him. He was as repulsive to her as a reptile.

"You are not going, dear Nora?" Evelyn said, as the former rose. "I had so much to say to you."

"You must wait till another day. I am going."

As Nora left the room, she glanced back at Evelyn, who had a bright colour, and who turned with interest towards Armfield; and, as she looked, she thought of Clifford's words —"She'll play him false."

Oh, it was not possible to prefer Armfield, with his low, bestial face and narrow mind, to Allan, with his intellectual beauty of soul and body. Perhaps Evelyn was a girl who always needed a little train of worshippers, but could be very true all the while to the one man she loved. It must be so. It was

stupid, silly, weak of her, but not false; and Nora tried to dismiss these thoughts from her mind. It was of no use. She remembered, more vividly than she wished, Evelyn's look of delight at the squire's advent.

To Nora, Cairn Cove had been desolate since Allan's departure. He had trusted Evelyn to her care. Could she tell him that his letters did not satisfy her, that she was jealous of his art, and that she was much elated by a visit from Armfield? What could she tell Allan about his love which would please him? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Nora thought over all this, and resolved to keep away from Evelyn for a little time.

Meanwhile, Evelyn was enjoying Armfield's visit. It was a pleasurable excitement to listen to his somewhat forcible compliments, and it gave her an all-conquering sensation to have fruit and flowers sent to her from Armfield Towers. It was but recently Evelyn had begun to receive these attentions. Dr. Holt having attended Armfield for a kick he had received from his horse, the squire condescendingly called at Sea View, and was introduced to Miss Holt. She was not the

kind of woman Armfield admired, but in his position he thought it right to patronize his doctor's daughter, and he felt pleased at her reception of him, and repeated his visits. He found that Evelyn listened with admiration to his descriptions of London life, and seemed rather awed by his intimacy with men and women of rank. He thought it quite right she should reverence his high position, and that she had no damned upstart notions; and, after he had known Evelyn for a month, he decided that she was devilish pretty in her own way.

As Armfield rode from Sea View that day, he mentally compared the two women whom he had honoured with his attentions. He preferred Catherine Severne. She was a woman whom other men would admire. He did not want to marry; but, if he did, she would be a wife men would envy him for possessing. He had always sworn he would never drag about an insignificant household drudge with him. He smiled as he thought that perhaps Catherine would hear of his attentions to the doctor's daughter. He would like to make Catherine jealous, she was so

confoundedly cool, though she flirted with him; had a sort of scornful air, as if defying him to win her, which was all damned nonsense; for a man who had considerable success amongst women of fashion was not likely to be resisted long by a country girl.

As Armfield thought all this, he felt conscious of looking uncommonly well on horseback, and wondered whether by chance he should meet Catherine.

What a fine voice the girl had, he reflected. If she were brought to London, and properly trained, she would be as good as any professional. Armfield knew nothing of music, and invariably admired the vulgarest kind; but it was the one art he had sympathy with, and Catherine's powerful, flexible voice had delighted him when he had heard her sing. He cared nothing for its want of sweetness, its total lack of all tender tones, but thoroughly appreciated the ringing force of it and executive capabilities. He judged, not wrongly, of the effect it would produce on the public; but did not suspect that the ground for his judgment was the probability

of there being in every public a large proportion of vulgar minds like his own.

A man's wife, Armfield often thought, must bear his name well; must be a woman whom people will turn and look at and talk about; must be fit for her position, otherwise a man is a precious idiot to marry her. Any other sort of woman it would be absurd to marry; she ought to hold quite a different place in his life.

It was not entirely out of Armfield's thoughts to marry Catherine Severne, but he had formed no plans. He would be at Armfield Towers for a considerable time, as his debts in London were numerous, and he must keep quiet, so he would try to amuse himself. Hunting, and one thing and another, would help to kill time. He resolved to be a very strict justice of the peace while resident in Cornwall. A man owes a duty to society in keeping down scoundrelism, he thought, as he pulled in his horse, recognizing a coastguard officer who was approaching on the high-road.

Armfield recommended this man to be extremely vigilant on the coast, and coupled

the advice with mysterious hints. He then rode onward, with a delightful sense of being an upholder of right and law, and comfortably forgetful of the claims of beggarly tradesmen, and of a miserly hound who had lent him some money, and who had the insolence to ask for it.

CHAPTER VI.

PLOTS AND ERRORS.

How desolate everything grew in those months of October and November. There were grey days, when nature was full of despondency; wild, stormy days, when sea and sky were wrathful. The winter was colder and crueller than usual, here on this iron-bound coast. Not often now was old Jos seen at work at his boats, one of which lay a long time unfinished. His eyes sparkled, as they always did, and there was no word of complaint on his lips; but physical pain and weakness could be seen in his every movement; the vigorous soul was there, but the body was slowly yielding itself to time. Nora noted every change. She had grown to love this old man as though he were her father. She had little to love. Her resolution not to see

Evelyn had been broken. The chill of winter had kept the latter much indoors. She was more ailing than usual. She found it dull. She wrote appealing letters to Nora to come and see her, and Nora went. They talked of Allan; but these visits always saddened, always irritated Nora. It was romantic to Evelyn to be secretly engaged, and satisfactory to her that there was one person who shared the knowledge of this romance; but there was no depth, no sacredness in her love for Allan. She would pout over his letters, if they did not seem devoted enough; dissect and discuss his love; babble about other admirers; and laugh at Nora, if sometimes, roused to indignation, the latter flamed out at littleness and petty deceit.

Drearily Nora always left Sea View, with ever growing distrust in Evelyn, and with the fight going on in her thoughts against yielding to her suspicions; for Nora's honest heart told her that there was a strong feeling within her which perhaps nourished this distrust. She missed Clifford; to him she could always talk of Allan without a jarring thought. She gradually found herself looking for Clifford's

return, and wishing that those words had not been spoken which had told her of his love. Perhaps he understood the hopelessness of it, and would say no more; and he was too brave, too free from vanity, to shun her because he could not win her love.

How surely the weeks and months define and strengthen the natural bent of character, and mark, with ever-increasing clearness, on the mind, even as on the body, the inevitable advance and decay of life.

The bitter winter suited Catherine Severne—seemed to brace her to more cruel keenness. She had learned many things, and had found that, for her career, observation answered all purposes in life. She grew popular at Cairn Cove. She gave little dinners, admirably managed, and received her guests with brilliancy. She knew well how to impress Armfield, and in her quality of mistress of The Dell she shone in his eyes; but Trevor Armfield had not yet asked her to be his wife. She chafed at the delay, but, having an active mind, she did not dwell too much on this annoyance. She made many schemes. At times she found herself yearning for Clifford's

return, yet she laughed to scorn the thought of loving him. Women are such fools when they are in love, she thought; they lose their heads, and are good for nothing. She could never be so weak. Yet, again and again, the desire to see Clifford returned.

Catherine had some link with the village life through Jessie Lawless, whom she employed to do needlework, and whom she paid well, with a view to her future usefulness. Catherine was a favourite with the parson, sang in the choir, and paid the Rev. Simeon little attentions which made him think he was not old yet; she was also friendly with Dr. Holt and his daughter. Clearly, Catherine was mistress of her position; but she never relaxed her watchfulness of Nora, who occupied, in Catherine's mind, the fixed place of an enemy, against whom any art might be employed in self-defence. In self-defence, therefore, she sometimes opened Nora's letters. Opportunities for studying them were not always good, and Catherine's cunning never allowed her to indulge her curiosity at the risk of being found out. She read Nora's letters when she knew Nora was

absent, and could not possibly detect her. From Allan's letters, Catherine learnt that he was engaged to Evelyn Holt, but she kept this knowledge to herself. She found a good deal of amusement in knowing that Allan made Nora his confidante, and she thought the latter an idiot to be bored with the history of a man's love for another woman; but, after some consideration, Catherine concluded that the right explanation of this correspondence with Allan was a wish on Nora's part to keep up an intimacy with him because of his being Clifford's friend.

Nora always received her letters safely. Catherine was never so clumsy as to rouse suspicion by concealing or destroying them. The time for Clifford's return approached. Before his next trip to France, Catherine counted on learning if he were a smuggler. From Clifford himself, from Jessie Lawless, or by her own watchfulness, Catherine hoped to ascertain all she wished to know.

Keeping up her position Catherine found to be expensive, and she began to live beyond her means; but then, in the distance, there was always the haven of Armfield Towers. One

black day, at the end of November, the clear vision of resting in that longed-for haven was somewhat clouded. Standing at the gateway of The Dell, Catherine saw her squire ride by with Evelyn Holt! Hitherto the privilege of riding Armfield's Arab mare had been exclusively Catherine's. She was so astonished that she scarcely returned their bow as they passed. Her eyes grew dark. Was this the meaning of Trevor's indecision? Did this poor fool of a girl think she could come between them? Catherine did not grind her teeth; that would have been a useless expression of wrath, and her anger never took a futile form. Oh, she would very soon find out the truth of this. She would give a little party; she would kindly invite Evelyn Holt and Trevor Armfield. They would come; she would see them together; she would know the truth before the evening was over.

Catherine returned to the house, and wrote the letters. She had an active mind.

The answers came next morning: a sweet note from Evelyn, saying that she had had a fight with her father, who objected to her going out at night; but she had pleaded so

earnestly that he had given in, and would not deprive her of such a pleasure. A short note from Armfield, saying he was always delighted to go to The Dell. This note was signed "Trevor."

So far so good; but this assembly would be much too small to make observation easy, and Catherine quickly decided to ask several other people. An itinerant artist, with whom she had made acquaintance on the sea-shore; the Rev. Simeon Moore, and a few heads of county families, occupying an undeniable position, these must be invited. This entertainment would make quite a stir in Cairn Cove. It would be as well perhaps to beg of Nora to be present. Catherine was glad Clifford would not be back; his presence might perhaps withdraw her attention from the chief object of this party. That evening Trevor must propose for her, or Evelyn must pay for it. Catherine wrote to London for a dress. In every way this party must be a success. She was not extravagant, but speculative, and was willing to risk a little for the chance of great gain.

When Catherine told Nora of this approaching festivity, and asked her if she meant to

appear, she was much surprised that Nora did not at once refuse.

"Of course," Catherine said, "it will not influence you in the least to say that it would look well that sometimes we should be seen together, and not live under the same roof, as if we were mortal enemies."

Nora smiled.

"No, it will not influence me. I never study how things will look. I don't think I'll attend your party, Catherine; I've no dress. You would not like me to wear my black Sunday dress—would you?"

"No. If you come, I expect you, like the other guests, to be in evening dress, and not to make a guy of yourself."

"Then I must plead a prior engagement. I fancy there'll be a dance at the Sea Gull that night."

Nora was in the mood to mock, and Catherine would have gladly turned her laughter to tears.

"Your companions," she answered, "are low enough; but you scarcely meet them at the village tavern. I'm not a fool, and know pretty well what you do."

Then she turned away.

The night of Catherine's reception came. The morning had brought her tidings of Clifford's arrival, and she could not refrain from writing to beg him to come; but she had not received a reply to her note.

Catherine dressed for this party in unusual excitement, and, as she looked at herself when her adornment was complete, she felt that not in vain had she striven to make her appearance a success. Her splendidly-formed neck and arms were dazzling; her bright hair gleamed; her eyes flashed; she seemed all aflame as she crossed the room in her dress of black-and-gold. To-night was to be no common night, this festivity no mere dull country gathering, without incident or excitement; it should bring her victory and delight, or it should bring others pain.

There had been a letter from Allan to Nora that morning, which Catherine had read. He was distressed that Evelyn did not write so often of late, and that she seemed constrained and sad. He begged Nora to tell him if Evelyn were ill, or if anything troubled her.

Catherine smiled cruelly when she read the

letter. She knew better than Nora the cause of Evelyn's unsatisfactory communications.

Nora had been out when Allan's letter came. It was carefully closed and placed on the hall table long before her return. She had been at Wreck Cottage, and it was quite late when she came home. She meant to slip into the library unnoticed; she had no thought of joining the guests. Catherine was singing as Nora entered the hall, and for a few minutes she stood and listened. How cruelly the voice rang out! It seemed to smite the ear with a heartless blow. The voice had power; but it seemed to Nora it was a power to hurt. Yet she could not remember that Catherine had ever done her any active harm. Was it merely the antagonism of their natures which made Nora feel to-night that the singer was as cruel as the voice that thrilled her nerves with a vibration which was pain?

As the song ended, Nora saw the letter lying on the table, and took it hastily. This was her joy, so eagerly watched for, so prized when it came. Nora read the letter there, by the lamp in the hall, and learnt, as Catherine had done some hours ago, that Allan was unhappy

about Evelyn; and Nora, too, knew the reason.

Her cheeks flushed and her brows contracted. Did this girl dare to cast a shadow on Allan's life? Did she dare to sacrifice him to her silly vanity and falsehood? Could she—Nora—look on without a word, while the man she loved, and who, at least, trusted her, was deceived; look on while time strengthened the bonds between him and Evelyn, bonds which could only be slavery and torture?

As Nora thought thus, all her nature seemed suddenly roused to a revolt against untruth, and to a resolve to have no part in it. She heard through the drawing-room door, which was just ajar, the voice of Mr. Armfield.

"Upon my word, Miss Holt, I'm proud to see my flowers in your hair. You are like them—meant for the warm south, too delicate, too lovely for our bleak Cornish coast."

Nora had not dreamt that Evelyn would be here. She had said she could not venture out at night. When these words reached Nora's ears, she went quickly upstairs. Catherine had asked her to join this party; she would do so. What could she put on? She dragged

out a box of her mother's, the key of which her father had given her, a box she had not looked into for years. She turned over the dresses to see if there was one she could wear. A simple, pale grey dress, which had been her mother's wedding gown—Nora could not touch it; a rather worn cloak; a pair of gloves; a bunch of dead violets; a bundle of letters, tied with a faded blue ribbon; this seemed to be all. No, there was a parcel at the bottom of the box wrapped in silver paper. Nora took it out, and unfolded it; and, as she opened it, the past came back so vividly that she forgot the present. She remembered the summer's day when her father had shown her this dress, and told her that a lady had given it to her mother; but that her dear mother had thought it too gaudy, and had never worn it. Nora remembered how delighted she had been, and how she had played with it till, looking up, she had seen her father's eyes full of tears, and then she had passionately thrust the dress away, as being the cause of her father's sorrow. All this scene came back to Nora, as she shook out the dress and looked at it. It was a dark ruby velvet, which had been worn a good

deal. It was cut in the fashion of fifty years ago, with a stomacher all embroidered with ruby beads, which sparkled in the candlelight; with strange sleeves; with a long beaded girdle, which went round the hips, and hung down low on the skirt; and with beautiful lace, quite yellow from age, round the neck and wrists. Nora looked at it for a moment, then put it on. She took but a few minutes to dress herself. She had no jewellery or ornaments of any kind. She remembered that a climbing plant, with delicate leaves of a soft green, grew on the house. She opened her window, and broke off two long sprays. One she twisted quickly round her throat as a necklet; the other she twined about her head. Then Nora looked at herself for a moment. It was perhaps an absurd dress; but it did not matter. She would wear it; she would speak to Evelyn to-night; she would tell her what she thought. One quick glance at herself in a very small mirror had given Nora but little idea of the general effect of her appearance. She thought she looked strange, but attributed this judgment to the fact of being unaccustomed to see herself in evening dress.

It was late now, and Nora heard the guests go into supper. She followed. They were all seated in the dining-room; and she stood a moment by the door before any one saw her. Clifford's eyes fell on her first; then Catherine saw her; afterwards every one looked at her. The hum of voices suddenly ceased, and there was silence for a minute—the silence of astonishment. It was as though some one from the long buried past had arisen.

Clifford had come to-night in the hopes of seeing Nora, had been angry that she was not there, had then cast his annoyance aside, had laughed and flirted as usual. He had loved Nora as a fearless, noble-hearted girl, when he had seen her in her simple every-day dress, swift and active as a deer, almost boyish in her words and actions. Was this the same Nora, this silent, beautiful woman, who stood there, with singular dignity of attitude, with a faint flush burning on her cheek, with eyes deep in colour from the earnestness of her purpose? Clifford did not know anything about her dress; it might have been yesterday's fashion, or a garment not worn since the days of the patriarchs; he only knew that she

was lovely, that her round, white throat showed its beauty in this dress, that her figure perhaps gained dignity from it; but her expression, the noble bearing of her head, made these details insignificant. After the first instant of astonishment, Catherine glanced at Clifford, and saw that his eyes had met Nora's.

So, it was for this Nora had decked herself and had come down; she had found out that Clifford was there. Thus thought Catherine. The evening was not over yet, and much had to be done. Guy had been by her side most of the evening, and her mad passion had strengthened; she knew that subtly some of her own thoughts had been conveyed into his mind, for he seemed intoxicated by her presence, had said reckless things, looked more reckless.

All the while Catherine had not lost sight of one object of this evening's entertainment. She had seen that Miss Holt seemed charmed with the squire's attentions, and was full of airs and affectations; but Catherine also saw that Armfield had watched her and Clifford with a sullen glance, and she knew that Trevor was enraged at her apparent indifference to

him. After supper, Catherine had decided that Trevor should propose for her, but Nora's advent had given a new turn to affairs. She had come for Clifford. Catherine almost gave up her scheme of conquering Armfield, and felt she must interfere between these two, but her prudence proved stronger than her passion.

"So you've relented," she said amiably to Nora. "I did not expect to see you to-night, least of all in such a magnificent costume!"

"I had nothing else to wear," Nora answered. "I suppose it looks funny; but it's evening dress, I believe."

"Where will you sit?" Dr. Holt asked.

Clifford had risen to give her his place. She walked over to him at once, and sat down; the chair was next to Evelyn. Clifford stood behind Nora. Catherine's eyes wandered to them, and there was fierce anger in her heart. Then Armfield spoke to her, and she recollected herself.

One thing at a time, she thought, and, turning towards Armfield, she answered him with a smile. As they all rose from the supper-table, Nora whispered to Evelyn.

"Let me talk to you for a little."

Something in Nora's face frightened Evelyn, and vexed her. She hated lectures and grave faces. To-night she felt bored by Nora. She was going to talk about Allan, probably. Well, she did not want to talk about him.

"If it's very confidential," she said, "can't you wait till to-morrow? I like a party, I like chattering to every one. You look too grave; you must keep all serious talk till to-morrow."

As she spoke, Evelyn gave herself a pretty, imperious air.

"I'm in the mood to speak now. I can't wait."

Then Nora drew Evelyn aside a little as they went into the drawing-room, and they sat down in the deep bay window by themselves.

Clifford had spoken twice to Nora, and she had not heard him, being quite engrossed by her thoughts, so he moved away, angry and hurt. He thought she need not be so cruelly cold; he had never persecuted her. He walked towards Catherine, who was talking to Armfield.

"Well, what is it?" asked Evelyn, pouting a little, and looking like a spoilt child.

"I have had a letter from Allan," Nora said at once.

"Is he ill?"

"No; but you are making him unhappy, Evelyn."

"Oh, is that all? I thought he must be ill; you looked so grave."

"He is worse than ill; I can see he is miserable. You don't write often, and you write coldly; you are forgetting him, Evelyn."

"Dear Nora," she answered purringly, "it's always Allan, Allan. Don't bother me about him now. I'm very fond of him; I write to him; I think about him. What more does he want? If he is unhappy away from me, he had better come home."

Evelyn felt important, and was not going to be a slave to Allan. Mr. Armfield had talked to her most of the evening, and paid her a great deal of attention—had told her she was lovely. Really Allan must not be allowed to think that he was the only man in the world.

"Besides, Nora," Evelyn continued, "what right has he to complain of me to any one?"

Nora blushed.

"You are quite wrong, if you think that he complained of you. He is only anxious, thinks you are ill, because you write unlike yourself, and wants to hear about you. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him I am not well, but that I dare say I'll get stronger soon, for Mr. Armfield is going to lend me a horse to ride, and the exercise will do me good."

Evelyn was excited; she was not going to be lectured. A poor, struggling artist must not imagine that he is to carry all before him. If Allan was so very anxious about her, he could have stayed here to take care of her. Evelyn's small brain was in a state of nervous irritation from the devotion of the great man of the county.

"Evelyn," Nora said scornfully, "you are selfish and heartless, or else you are pretending to be so. Allan loves you with all his soul. You could not hurt him, you could not play with others if you loved him rightly. No one can be half true in love."

Evelyn's eyes filled with tears; they were the tears of annoyance and mortification. Nora was spoiling her evening.

"I'm quite true to Allan. What business have you to scold me? You've quite spoilt my enjoyment. I'm not an ugly, stupid girl to sit in a corner and not be noticed. Women whom men never speak to may well be prudish and ridiculous. I don't want to hurt Allan if he is sensible; and he has no right to complain of me, and I'll tell him so. There's papa now; and I'll go home."

So Evelyn got up and walked to the other end of the room, but she had no idea of going home yet.

Nora was very troubled. In what a disagreeable light Evelyn would represent this conversation to Allan. But it was impossible, quite impossible to be silent and see Evelyn forgetful of the man whose every thought and hope was for her, and see her delighting in the courtship of Squire Armfield, whose revolting nature was marked on every feature of his face. Would Evelyn go on thus deceiving Allan, and break off her engagement in a fit of petulance; or would she let Allan return and marry her, and slowly discover that she had no love for him, and had merely accepted him through flattered vanity?

"Yes," said Clifford, who, unperceived, had taken the vacant seat beside Nora. "Yes, Evelyn Holt is a little fool, without a fragment of honour or of strength in her."

Clifford had followed the direction of Nora's eyes, and guessed her thoughts.

"And you are not angry, not jealous for your friend?" she asked quickly. "You are not indignant when you see she does not prize Allan's love an atom?"

"Oh, he'll find it out. Every fellow has to go through that sort of thing, I fancy."

"But his friends cannot look on with indifference."

Nora did not feel inclined to talk, even to Clifford, of Allan. She was out of harmony with every one. Guy sat beside her and was silent.

What was the passing fancy, the love, the passion he had felt for other women compared to that which he felt for this girl? What did it matter that he had lived recklessly, dissolutely, like every other man, and had taken pleasure of all sorts as he found it? All this did not touch the feeling that was in his breast now, seemed to have no more to do

with him than the clothes he had worn, or the games he had played when he was a child.

But Nora had no thought for him. He saw the preoccupied expression in her eyes, in her whole face; and when some of the guests rose to go, he was glad the spell was broken.

There was a peculiar smile on Catherine's lips as she took up her candle to go to bed. There was a jubilant light in her eyes, half-triumphant, half-malicious. She laughed as she looked at Nora before she entered her room; then shut the door and approached the mirror. Catherine contemplated herself for a few minutes with satisfaction. She had conquered, and she found victory was becoming to her. That night Trevor Armfield had proposed for her, and she had airily, conditionally, laughingly accepted; and, having achieved her object, she despised Armfield.

"What fools men are," she thought, as she slowly undressed. "Nothing but jealousy of Guy drove the squire to propose for me to-night; he would not stand that 'ruffianly skipper' being preferred to him."

Then Catherine's thoughts lingered on the "ruffianly skipper;" not tenderly—there was

no tenderness in her—but hungrily, with a determination never to yield him to Nora. If she could but be sure that he was a smuggler, this knowledge, she felt, would bring her into closer connection with him. Not that she thought Clifford would ever try to conciliate her from any fear of her betraying him. She had studied his character well enough to know there was no cowardice in him: but she hoped, in the possession of this secret, and skilful allusion to it, she might touch his heart.

Catherine's shrewdness failed in one point. She knew the attraction she had for Clifford; felt at times the power to madden him, to enslave him. But though she attributed to Nora a love for Clifford, and a persistent pursuit of him, Catherine never recognized that there could be in the heart of a man like Clifford a faithful, reverent love, differing widely from the passing admiration won from him by women such as herself.

There are some qualities of mind which most men and women cannot admit to exist in their fellows, unless there is some germ of the same in themselves. In all thought they are circumscribed by their own natures.

CHAPTER VII.

TREACHERY.

Could she leave Allan ignorant of Evelyn's indifference, of Evelyn's deceit? This was the question which presented itself perpetually to Nora's mind. She was Allan's friend, bound to be truthful to him; why should she shield Evelyn? From Allan's letters Nora knew how the thought of his betrothed was in all his daily life. His failures, his progress, his desires, his hopes in his art, all these Allan confided to Nora—he felt she understood them; but the goal of all was the surprise for Evelyn when he had achieved something, when he could hold his head up as a successful artist. Unconsciously he thus admitted that Evelyn could only understand results.

Nora would have swiftly informed Allan of everything—of Mr. Armfield's intimacy at Sea

View, of Evelyn's foolish flirtations—but for two thoughts, which held her back from speaking. Allan might leave Rome, and she knew well the value of undisturbed work; and stronger than this reason for silence, was the fear that her own love for Allan might have made her unjust to Evelyn. Nora therefore waited, but waiting was alien to her nature, and the days passed in a state of nervous excitement and indecision which spoiled their labour and their rest. She left Allan's last letter unanswered. She could never adopt the least shadow of pretence in writing to him.

Day by day and week by week Nora's ineradicable love for Allan grew. She accepted this love which had come to her as her lot, that which was to shape all her life. She had no girlish visions of a possible future of marriage and the joys of domestic life. She never supposed that any change in Evelyn or in Allan could turn the love of the latter towards herself. Her scheme of life was how best to serve Allan by this love of hers. She knew in the sadness of noble renunciation that she had nothing to receive. Clifford, she avoided now as much as possible; but sometimes he was at

Wreck Cottage with her, and sometimes they had bright hours there—this strange trio, old Jos, Nora, and Clifford. The latter had said no further word of love to her, and at times she almost forgot that he had spoken.

One afternoon, Nora told Clifford that it had been rumoured that he was a smuggler. He laughed.

"I think it would be difficult to prove it. I'm pretty safe. By the way," he added, "did you ever see the smuggler's storehouse?"

"Better the lass should not know of it," said Thornton.

"Don't you trust me?" Nora said. "Come, that's too bad of you."

"Trust you, yes; but it will all come to light some day, and I'd rather you were not mixed up in it. It will worry you."

"You shall see it. Never mind old Jos. We'll never be found out till the five years are up, which bind me and my men together, through fair and foul weather."

"You must have your way," said Thornton; "but perhaps you'll lock the front door before you introduce Miss Nora to the mysteries of Wreck Cottage."

"Bother the door. Your reception of strangers is too well known, you old ruffian, for any one to intrude."

Clifford took a candle, and followed by Nora, he entered the inner room, and approached the wall at the back of the cottage, which was built against the cliff. A chart and a few prints of ships hung against this wall. Clifford lifted one of the prints and unlocked a door. This door was well contrived. Here and there in the woodwork with which the wall was faced, there were deep cracks as from age; and the opening of the door looked quite similar to one of these, as it followed the grain of the wood instead of being cut in a straight line. When this door was opened it disclosed a cupboard with pegs, on which hung some garments of old Thornton's. Behind these there was a second door, as skilfully concealed as the first. Clifford unlocked this also, and Nora found herself in a low room or cave, into the further recesses of which the light of the candle did not penetrate.

Clifford took the key from the outer door, shut it, and locked it inside.

"I'm not going to murder you," he said,

laughing, "but this is a precaution which has become a habit."

"What a strange place it is!" Nora said, looking round and peering into the darkness.

"It's cut out of the rock at the back of the cottage."

"Those who made it must know of its existence."

"They are, long ago, gone to Davy's locker. I fancy it was made in the time of the wreckers; and I dare say the devil's work has been done here. Old Jos bought this crib—you know, it's a freehold; and he lived three years in the cottage before he found out this cave. Here," Clifford added, "will you sit down? I've no better seat to offer you than a case of 'baccy."

"This looks pretty secure, certainly," Nora said, with a smile, as she sat down; "but, after all, if the cottage were to be searched, I suppose the cave would soon be discovered."

"I think not. The backs of the doors are padded to prevent any hollow sound if they are touched; besides, though I may be suspected of being a smuggler, I'll swear I'm not suspected of storing brandy and tobacco here.

The usual dodge is to land it at night, and have it taken at once to the different places for selling it. By the way," he continued, "you have not told me who mentioned to you the report of my being a smuggler."

Clifford wanted to prolong this conversation. Even mentally he was no boaster, but as he looked at Nora he thought of the many women who would have been glad of his love, while this girl, for whom God or the devil had filled him with such passionate longing, such adoration as he could not tear from his heart, this slight, fearless girl sat there without the faintest increase of colour in her cheek, and her very glance made him feel that he must utter no warmer word to her, no matter what it might cost him to be silent.

"It was my step-sister, Catherine," she answered.

"Surely she would not use her knowledge against me—would she?"

"I do not know."

"You don't like her?"

"No."

"I wonder why? She's not a bad sort. She is selfish, I dare say, but so we all are; and she is a very fine woman."

Nora laughed.

"Yes," he added, "I suppose it would *be* hard for a man not to like a woman who *is* good-looking. As for me, I don't think I ever disliked a woman in my life."

"What a happy nature!"

"Not necessarily so," he answered sharply. Then he added in his usual tone, "Your sister will marry Squire Armfield, I fancy. By the way, I ought to be on my guard with her, as he is the representative of law in this district! I think she is too good for him; but, Lord, how women love position! Look at Miss Holt, she would chuck up Allan any day for the squire."

"Do you think she would really?" Nora asked eagerly.

"I'm certain of it."

"Then why don't you warn Allan?"

"He has never told me of this love affair. I would tell him like a shot if he had let me into the secret; but a subject a man never alludes to I have no business to touch on."

Nora was silent.

"Why need you be a smuggler?" she asked suddenly.

"There's no necessity for it, but I like to

make money, and I recognize no right in any one to prevent my doing it in this way."

"You don't care for riches?"

"They are uncommonly useful sometimes, and help a fellow to do what he wants."

Nora remembered something Allan had said in one of his letters about owing everything to Clifford. She understood the meaning of it now, and blushed with admiration of his generosity.

"I understand now, I guess what you've done for Allan," she said quickly.

"Oh, hang Allan!" he said impatiently. "I've done nothing for him. We were brought up together; he is the same as myself."

From which rather incoherent speech Nora gathered that Clifford did not wish the subject alluded to any further. She felt jealous that Guy could do so much for Allan, and that she could do nothing—nothing; must even look on and see his love betrayed.

Nora rose from her seat.

"Had we not better go back to Jos? He'll think we have both grown tipsy in the stronghold of brandy!"

Clifford opened the door lingeringly. Sorely

he was tempted to take her in his arms *and* kiss her as she passed near him; but no, *what* would be the good of it? What pleasure would there be in a forced caress from *her?* She must give it with her heart's love, and then, from king to slave, there could be no man so blessed as he.

"What the mischief kept you so long, lad?" Thornton asked Clifford as they re-entered the kitchen. He did not look annoyed at their absence. His eyes twinkled. It was a little romance of the old man's that these two should be sweethearts. Their long absence, he thought, meant something. Good Lord! when he was a youngster he'd have made the most of such a chance!

"I'm thinking, Master Guy," he said presently, "what you are to do when I am underground. Who'll keep the Wreck Cottage, and lodge your treasures for you, eh?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know, Jos. But you are part of the contract, you're bound for five years!"

"I'll not hold out as long as that. Don't you think now, lad, that Wreck Cottage would be a nice little dower for your bride?"

"Very," he answered, with an uneasy laugh; 'but as I don't see the most distant prospect of a bride, I have not begun to interest myself in her dower."

"Come, lad, don't be modest; you are a favourite with the women. They always like a 'captain bold.'"

All this time Nora was making Thornton's tea, and laying it on a little table near him.

"Well," Jos continued, "whenever I find the woman I'd like you to marry, skipper, I'll leave her Wreck Cottage. Maybe," he added in a lower tone, "I'll not have so far to look."

"I'll tell you this, Thornton," Clifford said earnestly, "this cottage, with a woman I loved, would be better to me than a palace; but if I had my will, I'd keep you in it, Jos. I've been sure of you ever since I was a wee chap, and I'm not likely to have the luck of any love like that."

Nora had poured out Thornton's tea, and was now tying on her hat with trembling fingers. All that had been said made her restless and unhappy. Perhaps they were not thinking of her at all, but the unwonted

emotion in Clifford's voice unnerved her; the thought of losing old Jos unnerved her. She wanted to be alone in the open air to think.

"Are you going, lass?" Thornton asked.

"Yes. Good-night."

"You'll go with her, I fancy," he said, looking at Clifford, who had risen.

"No," Nora said quickly. "Don't come; I should prefer being alone this evening."

"Just as you like," Guy answered, laying down his hat, which he had taken up.

"Do not think me rude and ungrateful," she said quickly, as she held out her hand; "I want to think of many things."

Her voice was unusually low, even tremulous. Clifford looked at her for a moment, then his bright smile came to his face.

"I won't say what I think you, but you shall be free from my escort to-day—only to-day."

Nora went out. It was almost dark now, though not much past four o'clock. It was a still, cold evening. For a little while Nora's thoughts dwelt on Clifford, but they soon returned to Allan Moore. Was it possible that Evelyn was false to him? Could she

listen to Allan's words of love and know that his whole life was given to her, and yet crave for other worship, other interest, other excitement? If it were so, Allan ought to know, then he could judge. If that sort of nature satisfied him, well and good; but he must not take her to his heart with quite a false notion of her; he must not have his career destroyed; the poetry, the aspiration of his soul, crushed by the treachery of a weak girl.

Nora felt she must not watch Evelyn, she must guard against that. The knowledge which would come through suspicious watching might be wrong—untrue. When at night you strain your eyes for something you dread, your imagination creates objects which affright you. No, she must not watch Evelyn; but if, without seeking it, knowledge of her treachery should come, then surely she, Nora, must speak. She could not hint at things, and leave the seeds she had sown to grow; that would be cowardly. There was but one thing to do—first, to tell Evelyn that she would speak to Allan, and then to do so. It mattered little how it ended; she must be black and cruel in their eyes. If their love were not broken, she would seem

evil-tongued, a commonplace slanderer. If Allan saw the truth and cast off the lie of Evelyn's love, he would yet hate the dispeller of the delusion, as men hate the light of dawn when it wakes them to pain.

Was there no power in her love? Nora asked herself. Could Allan never understand that which made her see the truth for him? After all, was the spirit a poor, helpless thing? Was it possible that, time after time, she should be with Allan and her soul should cling to his, her heart throb with tenderness towards him, and he should never know, no ray penetrate his mind, and all the while he should trust in a love which did not exist? Was Fate always lying in wait to deceive, playing tricks with mankind?

Nora was walking wearily, had almost ceased to move, so busy was she with her thoughts, when the sound of footsteps approaching made her look up. Round a turn in the road came Trevor Armfield and Evelyn. Evelyn was leaning on his arm and looking up in his face, while he seemed to be talking quickly and angrily. As they approached Nora, Armfield's voice changed to a caressing

tone, and she caught the word "darling." All this was in a few moments of time. It was so dusk now, that Nora thought it probable they might pass near her without noticing her. She felt a sudden conviction that if she listened for two minutes she should know the truth; half a sentence from Evelyn would make things plain. Nora shrank back from the thought. She kicked up the stones on the road, then she began to sing a little as she walked on. They looked up at once and saw her. Nora noticed that Evelyn started, and that she half withdrew her hand from Armfield's arm, and then quickly replaced it. They met Nora in the middle of the road, and Evelyn stretched out her hand with a smile. Nora looked gravely at her. Evelyn's eyes were glowing with the same light and warmth which beautified them in Allan's presence; she was more tremulous than she had ever shown herself; she was under the influence of some strong emotion.

"I always expect to meet you at untoward hours," Evelyn said, "otherwise I should have been startled to see you suddenly grow out of the dark."

She laughed nervously.

"I am coming from Wreck Cottage," Nora said carelessly.

"Walk back with us a little way, will you? I so seldom see you now?"

As Evelyn spoke she slipped her hand into Nora's arm, freeing herself from Armfield at the same time.

"Oh, I forgot," she added, "you do not know Mr. Armfield—do you?"

"Yes; I've seen him often," Nora answered, looking at him steadily, but she did not bow or give him her hand. "I am not going to walk with you. I am going home."

"Well, stay a minute; don't be in such a hurry. Why were you not at the Vicarage."

"Because it was pleasanter to be away."

"You are right. It was very stupid there, and I was heartily sick of it."

Evelyn talked on uneasily. She did not seem willing to let Nora go. She wanted to learn what impression this meeting had made on Nora, and to feel sure, before parting from her, that it had not been an unfavourable one.

Armfield was growing very impatient. He had not spoken as yet, but had traced figures

on the ground with his cane, and had appeared to pay no attention to the two girls. Now he turned and spoke.

"You said you were very tired, Miss Holt; you had better let me take you home at once. You can keep your gossip with your friend till another time—can't you?"

Evelyn said "good-night," and passed on.

Nora did not feel inclined to go home. She wanted to be alone with the evening, to watch the changing light, the swift-coming shadows, to listen to the wintry cry of the birds, and to breathe the sharp, frosty air. She despised Evelyn. Why, if that sort of life suited her—a life of excitement and frivolous flirtation—why should she not take it boldly and care nothing for what others thought of it? But Evelyn did care. She showed her fear in trying to detain her, first; now, in trying to read what she thought.

Suddenly Nora checked her scornful feelings. Why should she swiftly condemn in a narrow, intolerant way, and find fault with a nature which differed from her own? She ought to be able to sympathize with all natures, and to follow the workings of all minds and to

see where they led. She wanted to live broadly, to stretch her imagination as far into the depth of weakness as into the heights of heroism, and not to be enclosed in the narrow compass of a girl's ignorant foolishness. Her intelligence was very limited if she could only sympathize with a character whose tendencies were the same as her own. It would mean that she only admired herself, thought all pure and noble nature was imaged in her own soul. She must think of Evelyn fairly. A few pleasant talks with Trevor Armfield, a little gratified vanity at being the object of the squire's attentions, or a desire to break the monotony of her life in some way, these things may have led Evelyn into an intimacy with Mr. Armfield, upon which he may have presumed. Yes, Nora recognized that it was possible such an intimacy might have grown without any treacherous intent. She would try to think of it thus, but she would not see Evelyn for a while, till the distrust had died out or had taken clearer form.

What a mysterious hour this was, when time was fading from day to night, from the manifold colours of life to the grey shadows of

death. Now and then the gentle ripple of the weary waves came on the air. Nora stretched her arms out as though taking Nature into her embrace, but closed them with a sigh, for within their circle there was nothing but her own imaginings. She had gone round the village, the longest way home. The clear air took up the sounds of the villagers' voices, and gave them softer, more melodious, to her ear than they came from human lips.

How beautiful, how all-powerful she is, kind Nature, patiently clothing ugliness with beauty, leading falsehood into the light of her immutable truth—being an inexhaustible fount of poetry to us, which touches us in spite of ourselves, and protests eternally against the hollow formulas on which we strive to build our lives!

The whole universe was Nora's as she passed along. She estimated in these moments of exaltation the separation between the body's and the soul's pleasures; the former ever decaying, the latter ever growing; the former sickening with satiety, the latter expanding with increasing desire. It had grown dark now, and the blue of the sky had changed to blackness. By-and-by the moon would be

up and the stars come out, then the sky would change again to a mysterious blue, with strange depths in it.

Nora heard footsteps behind her, and turned her head. It was too dark to distinguish the figure till it came quite close to her, then she saw that it was Jessie Lawless. Nora disliked this girl. She had a coarse, insolent expression, and though very young, and rather handsome by reason of her dark, flashing eyes, her features had taken that formlessness which seems indicative of a bad life.

"Good evening, miss," the girl said, as she drew near.

Nora had often spoken to her, she returned her greeting now.

"May I make bold to ask if you are going home to The Dell, miss?"

"Yes."

Nora was not inclined to talk.

"It's lonesome along here after dark. Don't you feel scared?"

"Not at all."

"Did you never meet Tregeagle when the devil is chasing him round the tarn?"

"No," Nora answered with a smile. "I

thought he was always trying to empty the pool with a limpet shell."

"No; sometimes the devil chases him, and at last he flies to the chapel, puts his hand in at the window and gets relief from his torments for a bit."

"Did you never see the Death Ship?" she added, "nor the White Lady? Are you not afraid of ghosts?"

"I don't think I am."

"But you might be afraid of living creatures, walking alone at this hour."

"There's nothing to be afraid of. Who would hurt me?"

"No; you're a lady," she answered with a harsh laugh. "Do you remember Black John's dream about heaven? Everything went on just the same as down here—the gentlefolks nearest the fire! No one would harm *you;* gentlemen know better, they'd be afraid; but it does not matter about a poor girl."

Nora looked at Jessie closely. Had she been drinking? Her face was red and her eyes had a fierce glow in them. Nora did not wish to talk to her, yet she could not let this, which Jessie had said, pass without comment.

"I don't think the accident of station has much to say to it. I fancy a poor girl is as safe as a rich one."

"Is she?" she answered angrily. "That shows you know nothing about it, or you don't choose to know. Look how cleverly a gentleman tell lies to a poor, ignorant girl, and leads her on till she can't call her soul her own! He daren't ruin a lady; it would get known. A lady can't be put away, and paid to be quiet, and forgotten."

She laughed loudly. Her voice jarred on Nora's ear. She shrank from her as from something loathsome. She wanted to rush away. This was a repulsive side of character. Yet, after all, it was human—something which existed in the world, which must be considered, and was only ignored or neglected by selfish fools.

"Why are you talking like this, Jessie? If I can do you any good, tell me; if not, you had better hold your tongue."

"You might do me good, surely, if you would," she answered in a cringing tone. Then Jessie added, "But you wouldn't; you would never have the pluck to speak for me. These

sort of things must be kept dark. Ladies must not know that the gentlemen who come into their drawing-rooms seduce the girls they pass on the road. It would not do, because by-and-by the same gentlemen might want to make an honourable match, and, if ladies knew the truth, it would look bad to be their wives, whilst if they only guess, it don't matter—does it?"

Again Jessie laughed loudly.

"I'm not much afraid of anything," Nora answered, with her old smile, "the villagers know that pretty well; but I don't know if I have any right to interfere or even hear your story. People have to fight for themselves, I believe."

She did not look at Jessie, for her face was so unpleasant to her that Nora felt she could not be just if she looked at her.

"Why shouldn't I tell you? There! you are afraid it will hurt your ears, that I'll tell it too plain. Maybe some lady would tell you the same story in a pretty way, and you'd not mind. That's the way with you gentry."

Nora was silent. She had conquered her cowardice and would listen.

"Go on," she said abruptly.

Jessie came very near Nora and dropped her voice to a hissing whisper.

"You've noticed the wee child at Mother Linton's—the sunny-haired boy? Well, the child is mine; and Guy Clifford is its father."

She stopped in the middle of the road and threw her head back defiantly. Nora involuntarily stopped also. She wished, with all her heart, she had not heard this.

"Why do you tell me?" she asked quickly.

"Because if things were not kept dark there might be more justice. He promised to marry me. Why should I be ashamed. The fault is his, since he broke his word."

"If Mr. Clifford wants this kept a secret, it's mean and treacherous of you to tell," Nora said indignantly. "Besides, what can I do?"

"Folks say he wants to marry you."

"Folks lie," answered Nora quickly. "Don't let their lies distress you. I have no thought of marrying Mr. Clifford."

"Perhaps not; but you would not have the pluck to take my part? It's not likely."

"You don't care for him?"

"How can I, when he has broken his word. But he is a comely man."

They were walking on now side by side.

"If you don't love him, why do you want him to marry you?"

"Why?" Jessie laughed, then continued, "That's a queer question! Why, if I'm married, I could hold my head up with the best of them; and the vicar wouldn't pass me by and never so much as nod to me. Why do I want young Clifford to marry me, that's a notion!"

Again she laughed, but this time with evident enjoyment, as at something really ludicrous.

"Don't you see," persisted Nora, "that if you were his wife to-morrow, that would not alter things at all. It would make a new bad state of things, because you would marry some one you did not love; but it would not change anything that had happened."

Jessie did not speak for a minute.

"I don't make out what you mean rightly, you speak too grand; but most folks think of the looks of things; perhaps you don't mind as much as the rest. After all, ladies are no better than the rest of us. I met Squire Armfield just now with Miss Evelyn Holt and

he was kissing her, and they say her lover's in Rome."

She said this rapidly, before Nora could stop her.

"That's not true, Jessie."

"I saw them with my two eyes, that's all."

"You made a mistake in the dark. I know Miss Evelyn."

"May be you do, and may be you don't, but it's a mistake, if you like it."

"Yes, it was a mistake of yours; and, if you care for me to be your friend, you'll not repeat the story."

"I'll keep it close."

They had reached The Dell entrance. As Nora opened the gate she paused and said—

"I wonder why you told me all this."

"You don't like to hear it? You want to see everything pretty, and turn your back on the rest? Well, you can't. Good-night."

Jessie nodded, drew her shawl over her head, and disappeared in the darkness; and as she went down the road she sang, in a strong, coarse voice, which yet had some richness of tone—

"Thus said the rushing raven
Unto his hungry mate:
Ho! gossip! for Bude Haven,
There be corpses six or eight.
Cawk! Cawk! the crew and skipper
Are wallowing in the sea,
So there's a savoury supper
For my old dame and me."

words came distinctly through the still, ty air, and they sounded weird and wild. Nora walked up the avenue, and the beauty med gone from the night, and the world to a base place.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALONE ON A WIDE, WIDE SEA.

NORA had a letter from Allan next day, a letter full of enthusiasm, full of the true delight of reverence. Nora knew all about the places he visited. She had read the legends of the saints, whose history art had recorded; she had studied the lives of the great painters; she knew where every piece of sculpture Allan wrote of was placed; so, in reading his letter, it almost seemed to Nora as though she were with him. Yet of the treasures of Rome she had only seen a few bad prints; and no pictures had ever delighted her, but those God made of wind and waves, of light and air on the wild Cornish coast. Allan's letter ended with a request that Nora would soon write and tell him how Evelyn was looking, how she employed her days—would tell him every little

trifle which Nora's kind heart might guess would interest him. Allan added that he was surprised at not having heard from Nora, and that, having had a touch of fever, he was foolishly disquieted and full of fears.

Nora felt she could not answer this letter yet. She must not see Evelyn for a few days, she must grow more calm, must think more dispassionately of everything.

A day went by, and a letter came from Evelyn begging Nora to go and see her. Nora refused to go. Another day passed, and then on the morrow, as Nora leaned out of her bedroom window to fasten up some creepers which the night wind had blown from their holding, she saw Evelyn sauntering up to the hall door.

Without a moment's hesitation Nora fled. She passed through the kitchen, running fast, to the astonishment of the servants, through the back entrance and down the narrow path which led by the wood to the sea. It seemed to Nora that she was flying from falsehood and pretence, which were ready to seize her if she lingered.

The winds and the waves had not calmed down since the night's storm. They were as

restless as Nora's mind, not sure if they should sink to peace, or rise to passionate anger. The boat lay fastened to a stake in the creek, the sculls were in her. Nora, without pausing to notice sea or sky, jumped in, and letting the boat loose, shoved out from shore. She took the oars and rowed.

What a sense of freedom there was on the water! Gradually all things seemed to take their proper place, dropped their distortions, and seemed possible to deal with.

Why, thought Nora, should she avoid Evelyn? It was best to speak to her clearly. It was not easy to understand people if they did not explain themselves. She must listen to all Evelyn might wish to say. Did she not listen to the sounds in the air, and the cries of the sea birds, that she might know the will of the elements? Everything had a voice to which men must hearken. All things held their secrets—the green waters, and the dark earth, and above all the sky.

Nora had shipped her rudder, and was rowing lazily, and the puzzled feeling was passing away from her brain.

Nora began to think of the legends of the

place. Surely the air was full of beings. We live in the centre of immensity; millions of years behind, and millions before us, and the hours are slipping away into the great space. Spirits are slipping away, perhaps to the years to which they belong. Why should the years be lost—the years which give, and take, and make, and destroy? They are waiting to receive their creatures.

Thus Nora mused dreamily.

Perhaps all the thoughts that flash through our brain are the whisperings of the spirits which float around us in the air. If we listen we may learn their wisdom, and so go to our own place; but if we will not listen, having learnt nothing, having nothing to whisper to the souls of men, we may drift through ages helplessly, and so learn our foolishness.

Out here on the waters, Nora thought, had she not seen strange things? Heard faint, sighing voices, and the sweep of passing forms, and seen the motion of the light, wafted by wing beats.

The swish of the water against the boat's side and the increased motion made Nora look round and notice where she was going. She

had run much further out than she was wont to do, and was facing the rocks, which were the seamen's dread. It began to be a little dusk; and it would be a long row against the tide home. Nora had been drifting unconsciously. She was not afraid, she merely felt disinclined to turn homeward yet, for to do so meant a hard pull, and just now she was dreamily thinking, making no physical exertion, but hearkening to all that sea and sky would whisper. So for a little while yet, Nora would not turn towards shore.

A white mist came down over sea and land, and wrapped them in mystery. The rocks moved away and changed to strange shapes. Suddenly the boat swayed with a new motion. Nora began to pull, and tried to turn the bow of the boat in what she believed to be the direction of the shore, but the mist grew thicker and thicker, till here and there darker lines and shadows were the only indications of locality. Nora pulled with a strong stroke. She was not frightened. She had been so often out alone. The winds and the waves had never been cruel to her; it was not possible, she loved them too much.

Why were her hands all at once feeble and useless? Why did she feel as if in the grasp of a power, stronger than herself, which she could not and must not resist? Why was there such fascination in yielding herself? Her ears seemed filled with murmurings. The curling mist rolled back. She looked up and saw a faint outline through the dusky air. As she gazed the outline grew more distinct, till a vaporous form, from which rayed a roseate light, seemed clear before her. The form was a woman's. She had a rose between her lips; she beckoned with one hand, and smiled.

Nora knew now that she was off the Death Rocks. How had she come so far? Had this wraith been beckoning all along? Had there been a moment when she might have turned and been saved? She knew the current was drawing on the boat, and that she had no strength to resist; it must be sucked down, or dashed to pieces.

For a minute Nora closed her eyes, and mentally she strove to peer into the immensity whither she was going so fast.

"Oh, it is too vast, too vast," she thought, "there is no corner for me!"

Then she looked up again, and the wraith moved in the mist. It seemed to exult, its movements grew like a fiendish dance of triumph, and the boat sped faster. Then Nora closed her eyes again, and a chill crept round her heart. She knew she was sore afraid. Then she put the fear away. She thought of Allan. She would be with him in spirit always, she would counsel him, she would show him the true and the false; he would listen to her whisperings. Love can vanquish all in a woman's heart. Nora's terror had gone. She saw the black rocks now, and the wraith had disappeared. A moment or two of life, and then a plunge into that immensity which awaited her.

Quick as lightning, Nora girt up her skirt, and stood erect. She would not be dragged down with the boat, that she had resolved. She would spring out as she felt the boat sinking beneath her. Vertical, black, cruel, the rocks rose before her; green and quiet looked the waters far down, in contrast with the white foam on their surface. Now, Nora suddenly felt the boat going, and, firm to her purpose, she sprang as clear of it as her

strength allowed. She did not direct her spring. What was the good of it? All around was the same water, the same death. The cold sea struck her limbs, but her outstretched hands grasped the jagged rocks, and, with the instinct of self-preservation, clung to the unexpected support. The rocks cut into her flesh, but she did not think of loosing her hold. She drew herself up to the point she grasped, and saw now that it was a long, narrow projection at the foot of the great wall. The waves dashed over it, but always it reappeared as if defying their fury. It was easy to clamber on it, and, without thought of what was to follow, Nora reached it safely. She could hold her ground by crouching on the rock, and clinging with both hands to the upright point, which she had seized at first. The waves washed over the lower part of her body, but her head and shoulders were only reached by the spray. She had chosen a lingering and horrible death, instead of a swift and painless one. Far, far around her was the great stretch of water, which seemed endless in the mist; and on either side of the ledge on which she rested were black depths, into which one

moment's dizziness or relaxing of her grasp must roll her. And now a death such as this seemed much more ghastly than the swift ending so near to her a few minutes ago. The effort to save herself had created a hunger for life. Visions of happiness, of love, of joy, came and mocked her. Death seemed a cruel fate, an annihilation without hope. A long, shrill cry broke from her lips, though she clenched her teeth and tried to keep back the cowardly sound. Scarcely had her cry died out ere she seemed to hear a faint reply.

"Ah," she thought, "it is an echo; the only voice here is my own." But her blood ran quicker with sudden hope, and her body glowed in the icy water. The mist was clearing a little, the dark line of shore afar off began to show. How distant it was! Her loudest cry could not reach half the way; the air would catch up the sound and lose it.

Nora could not call now, her voice had no power; her lips parted, but no sound came.

Of course the voice she heard was an echo. She would not moan again; it should not mock her; she would die bravely. It

was not harder for her to die than for millions of others. Men and women had died in torture with a smile on their lips; why should not she? There certainly was no one to look on and admire her fortitude. Even as Nora thought this, she smiled. But this flash of vitality did not last. The mist was clearing away more and more, and now she could almost see the white cottages. The sun was shining there, fitly, for *there* was life and laughter; here the mist still lingered like a white shroud. A few tears gathered in her eyes and fell; then a calm came in her mind, and the cold crept up and numbed her limbs. A kindly stupor was stealing over her. In a little while her weak, tired fingers would loosen their grasp, and gently she would roll over and sink in the green depths.

Five minutes more passed, then a loud "Halloo!" rang out through the air above her. To Nora it sounded very far off. Perhaps it came from the shore, but her voice could not reach there in reply; besides, what did it matter now? It was nearly over. Why rouse herself? she did not feel wretched, after all.

Another shout came, and on the summit of the rock appeared the figure of Guy Clifford. Nora could not see him, for, though the fog had almost cleared away, her eyes were closed, and she was fast becoming dead to all sights and sounds.

"It was surely here that I heard the cry," thought Clifford, as he lay down at the cliff's edge and peered over. In a moment he caught sight of Nora. He could not see her face, but something in the form, the dress, struck him as like her, and the words "Good God!" burst from his lips.

He made fast to an upright rock a rope which he carried, took hold of it and flung himself over the cliff without the delay of a minute. As he went down, hand under hand, he planned how he could carry her up, and a hundred times he assured himself that it could not be Nora, and might only be a body washed up from a shipwreck and caught by its clothes on the jagged rocks; but such assurance was in a few moments dispelled. He crept out on the projection. It was covered with slimy sea weed, and he had to advance cautiously. He bent down, raised the head

and saw that it was Nora. Her hands had relaxed their hold, but she still rested there by the slight tenure of her dress. A few minutes more and the waves would have freed her and borne her away. She was quite unconscious. Where would be her waking?

Clifford could take her up by tying her to himself and carrying her up with him, or by fastening the rope under her arms, ascending first, and drawing her up afterwards. The first plan seemed impossible without help and on this perilous footing, so he quickly fastened the rope round her, climbed up, and began to haul. He luckily had found a spot where the rope fell clear of the rocks, and he drew Nora to the summit without bruising her.

Clifford took a long breath as he laid Nora down and untied the rope. He had rescued her from the sea, but had he rescued her from death? Her lips were livid, and there was no warmth in her limbs. With the deftness of a sailor's fingers he took off her dress, and wrapped his coat round her. Then he unfastened her boots and drew them off, her stockings also. He rubbed her feet and rolled them in his warm dry waistcoat. Then he

paused and looked at her. It would be an hour yet before the tide turned, and before it would be possible for him to carry her to the mainland. She might die here without stimulants or heat to restore her. There was wild despair in the man's heart, such as he had never known. He hesitated a moment, looking down on her bloodless face; then he sat down on the bleak rock and drew her into his arms. He clasped her close, he laid her head on his shoulder and pressed his cheek to hers, and thus he sat, with nothing but sea and sky around him, watching for a sign of returning life. So clasping her, all the love Clifford had felt before grew in intensity. He wiped the sea spray from her lips, he called her by loving names, and the hot blood which flowed through his encircling arms drove the death-chill from her. He felt her heart beat, a feeble fluttering throb. He knew that she lived, and in his delight he kissed her long and passionately. She knew not of it. It was the first and the last embrace he might ever give her.

Thus, in the arms of Guy Clifford, Nora came back to life. The instant he saw her

eyelids unclose, he laid her down and sprang to his feet. He turned his head away and sobbed. Nora was too feeble, too dazed to notice anything at first; even when she could see Clifford, the rocks and the sea, she could not understand. By-and-by she remembered.

"By Jove! you were almost gone," Guy said, talking quickly and disguising his emotion; "but you'll soon be all right. I had to take off your dress, it was so fearfully wet; but my coat does instead."

He knelt down beside her and began to rub her hands. He could not relinquish altogether the privilege of touching her. She did not resist him, she was too puzzled. Suddenly Clifford remembered that he had a little flask of brandy. He found it in his coat-pocket, and made her drink some. By-and-by she could speak.

"How strange! How did you find me? How cold it is!"

"If you could put your arms into the coat you would be warmer. Let me help you."

So he lifted her up a little, and put the coat on. She looked round and began to understand. She soon made the discovery that she

had no shoes and stockings; also that Clifford was divested of coat and waistcoat, and that the latter was serving her as a foot blanket.

"Oh!" she said, and a tinge of colour came in her white face.

She looked at Clifford, and they both smiled.

"It's very funny," she said; "but I don't call it fair. And how am I to get home?"

"I'll carry you as soon as the tide is low," he said promptly, drawing a little nearer to her.

"I think not. I'd like to walk."

"I don't see how you can. Would you like to look at your boots?"

He brought them to her. Even in this short time they had shrunk absurdly. She looked at them ruefully.

"I don't think I could get them on, and I am not strong enough to try."

"Then I must carry you," Clifford said triumphantly.

"No; you can go back and send me some dry boots and clothes, and I will follow in due course."

"I certainly will not leave you alone in your present state."

"You talk like a family doctor," she said,

with a little laugh. "I have not been ill—have I? Only nearly drowned."

"Only!" he said a little fiercely.

He could not yet shake off the influence of the last hour, the dread was still near him.

"I would not leave you here alone for worlds." Then, with an effort, he changed his tone and said lightly, "A wave might sweep you away, even now."

Of course she must not guess all that had happened, nor must he dwell upon his having saved her life.

"I begin to feel quite alive," Nora said, after a few minutes' silence, "and am full of devices. Help me to stand up, please."

He lifted her to her feet, and she put her hand on his shoulder to steady herself.

"I am all right now. I want to go to the edge, and I want you to explain how you got me up."

"No," he said, standing between her and the edge of the rock, "not now. Another day you can come out here at low tide and see, and I'll explain how I brought you up. Never mind now; we must get home somehow. If you won't let me carry you, then you must walk,

for there will be but a quarter of an hour when we can cross the low rocks and be dry ; if you wait longer you must wade, and I think you have had enough of the water."

He spoke roughly. He longed to get her safely home, for he saw that she shivered, and he feared the effect of a few hours more exposure.

"Then I had better dress for the journey," she answered, with a smile.

She put on her stockings, then tied her boots on the soles of her feet with her handkerchief, which she tore in half.

"You must give me your arm," she said; "I am not very steady. Come along."

Their progress was very slow, Nora's shoeing not being satisfactory. When they reached the low rocks, they found them covered by the sea in some places. Nora was looking worn and white. Clifford stopped for a second.

"I am going to carry you across here," he said firmly. "It is utter rubbish your refusing to allow me. If I choose to do so, you can no more resist now than you could when you were insensible, so what's the good of it?"

When he had spoken the last words, he took her up in his arms like a child and stepped down into the water. He went on silently, feeling his way with great caution, lest he should slip his foot and let her fall, carrying her very firmly and easily. Nora did not speak. She was very weary, she felt at rest and warm. As they neared the mainland Clifford's grasp tightened. Nora could feel his breath on her face, and she heard faintly the muttered words, "Oh, my darling, my darling; I have saved you; you are mine."

She did not quite understand, her senses were half numbed, but into her mind came Jessie's story, which Clifford's presence had not recalled till now.

There was a cottage not far inland, and they went there. Clifford explained vaguely to the old woman, who seemed the mistress of the dwelling, that Nora had been nearly drowned, and he asked that she might warm and rest herself. A half-drowned visitor was preferable to none in this lonely place; and the old woman received her with delight, insisted on clothing her in all her best garments, and would have carried her generosity so far as to make move-

ment impossible by the weight of wraps, had not Nora laughingly resisted.

When Nora came to the kitchen fire, she found Clifford asleep, his head propped against the wall. She sat down opposite to him. Her presence roused him at once. He opened his eyes and saw her looking at him fixedly, but even through the dimness of vision, caused by recent slumber, he recognized that her gaze was in no wise tender, but merely scrutinizing.

"If we get home before nightfall we need not trouble any one with this adventure—need we?" she asked.

"No; but can you walk all the way?"

"Yes."

After a while, when they had rested a little longer and Nora had drunk some warm ale, they started homewards.

They walked along silently for some time. Clifford was thinking how near to him Nora had grown since he had saved her and held her in his arms, and, as his eyes rested on her in the dusk, he felt that it was impossible to give up all hope of so holding her again. If it had been sweet to kiss her when she was unconscious, how much sweeter when her eyes looked

back at him fondly and her lips glowed with passionate life! And yet he must not speak now, for he knew there was no return of his love, and he did not dream of working upon her feelings of gratitude. By-and-by, perhaps; but a day seemed an eternity to him now, the months of increasing love had grown to white heat in the last few hours.

Nora, as she leaned on Clifford's arm and walked by him silently, felt angry that Jessie's story lingered in her mind; felt that it was cowardly and mean to accept all Clifford's kindness, and to conceal from him that she knew part of his life. If the story were true, and she supposed it was, he was apparently cruel and heartless. She wished him to know that she knew this story. She did not wish to judge him. He might have excellent reasons for his actions, and it was not her business, but somehow it seemed dishonourable to conceal this knowledge. It was strange to speak of such a thing, perhaps; but did it matter? It was cowardly to shrink from speaking because it was a little awkward. So the words came—

"The other evening Jessie Lawless met me and walked along the road with me."

"Well?"

Clifford could not see the appropriateness of this remark.

"She told me her story. I thought I ought to tell you that I know it. Pretended ignorance seems very like lying. Of course it does not concern me at all, but somehow I thought it right to say I know."

Clifford looked at her.

"What do you mean?"

She returned his glance. Was it possible that he did not understand her, or was he hypocritical through and through? She felt angry with him. He was purposely making it difficult for her to explain. Her eyes flashed.

"It's not easy for me to talk about it, and yet I don't see why it should not be. I suppose I've caught the infection of custom. Jessie Lawless told me that you had broken your promise to marry her, and had forsaken her and her child. It seems dishonourable to know this and not say that I know it—that's all. I don't want to affect being specially virtuous and honourable, I've only got my own notions."

She threw her head back and looked at him.

She did not care what Clifford thought of her. She spoke rapidly, but the length of her speech gave Guy time to check the oath that was on his lips. It would have come forth before any one but Nora. He was quite silent. He clenched his teeth and fought hard not to curse the woman who had infected Nora's mind with such a vile story. A few hours ago he had held this girl, whom he loved, in his arms, and had dreamed that some day she might love him—that in some happy hour, when he had won her, he might tell her of this day's agony and joy; and now she was coolly telling him this repulsive lie, fully believing it, and mentioning it much as a man might, scarcely as any girl would, specially one who had even the faintest liking for him. It was too ludicrous. He laughed out loud. The laugh did not sound merry. Nora looked at him in astonishment.

"Excuse me," he said quickly and rather stiffly, "I could not help being amused at the believing way in which any statement, however monstrous, is accepted by one's friends. *You* tell it out, other people keep it to themselves, but it sticks in the minds of all. The

story you have heard is an infamous lie. You are at liberty to believe Jessie Lawless or me. She is not a woman I wish to talk to you about, nor should I like to give you such particulars of her character as would throw light on the subject. It may be foolish delicacy on my part, but that can't be helped."

The natural, bright tone, which was always in Clifford's voice, had gone. In such a mood Nora had never seen him.

"Of course, I know," she said quickly, "that girls don't speak out, that they only gossip together behind men's backs about such stories. You see, I've trained myself, and I don't perhaps pay enough heed to what is thought usual. It always seems plain to me what I ought to say, and this is one of the things I felt I ought to say. I beg your pardon," she added, "if I have hurt you—I mean, if I have said anything unkind. I am sorry, really sorry. I don't mind about your thinking it coarse of me to speak. I dare say it seems so, but I was not thinking of that at all."

Clifford was silent. He could see that Nora was distressed, not at all because of her-

self, but because her words had so affected him.

"Nora," he said gently, "don't mistake me. I would pledge my life that there is more purity in your heart than in nine-tenths of the women that live, but I believe I am too much infected by worldliness fully to understand you. I cannot bring myself quite to like your touching on such subjects; but I know it is because you are truthful and good that you have done so."

Nora laughed.

"I am not truthful and good at all; and it's not likely you can understand me when I don't understand myself! But why should I try to? Life is simple enough if one is not afraid of things. Perhaps my way of thinking and acting comes from living so much with the winds and waves; I don't know. There never seems anything else for me to do but what I do."

"I want to explain to you, that Jessie Lawless is not a good woman. I don't mean to condemn her, poor devil, but I think you had better not talk to her."

"Why? She cannot hurt me. I might be

of use to her; she might be of use to me. There is nothing in the world, in life, that can be smothered up and not thought about—is there? I see the same lying, the same selfish passion in other people as in Jessie, only that in her it is not dressed up and made presentable. I'd like to know about it, and to understand about the difference in natures."

"God bless me, you've got into deep water! I've no more line and can't take soundings. You had better come in close to shore, if you want me to understand you."

His voice had assumed its usual tone.

Nora laughed.

"I have lived in a nook, and you have been out in the world, what I say can't be beyond you."

"Honestly, there is a side of life which a man would like shut out from the woman whom he"—he corrected himself quickly—"from all women he respects."

"Which women chatter about with mock horror and loathing, and men talk of together with relish and laughter?"

"How the devil do you know what men talk of?"

He almost stopped walking.

Nora laughed.

"There is much knowledge that comes without experience. There is nothing which observation and imagination can't teach, and in a truer way, too, than you are taught from outside."

Clifford shook his head.

"I'll do the best I can," Nora added, "and we'll see what comes of it."

It was almost dark. The wind had changed, and, for a winter's night, the air was kind and balmy. Guy's brain was aglow with tender thoughts. They were near the outskirts of the village. They passed fishermen walking with their sweethearts; they held each other's hands and leaned towards one another in the sweetness of confidence. Clifford looked at Nora. Her eyes were on the ground, she seemed unconscious of his presence. It was hard. He had saved her from death; but for him she could not now be here, walking on the earth. Was she not his? And yet she had no loving glance for him, no word. Was she not his by every law of justice? He half stretched out his arm to put it round her

neck. His heart ached with longing. Was it possible she did not know? The hot words came to his lips, he must speak.

"Nora."

She turned her head with a start, she had not been thinking of him at all.

Just then a girl approached, stopped in front of them for a moment, laughed, and was going to pass on, when Nora said quickly, "I am sorry you told me that lie, Jessie; it was stupid and unkind. What was the good of it?"

A fierce look came into Jessie's face.

"A lie, was it? He says so? But he did not tell you that we were——"

Before she could finish her sentence Clifford interrupted her—

"By God! if you say another word I'll strangle you." His face was white with rage, his hand was half raised as if to clutch her.

Jessie never flinched; she laughed again.

"I didn't know you were sweethearts. Of course you don't want her to hear."

Then she turned on her heel and walked away.

"That's the sort of woman you want to talk to!" Clifford said hotly. "Your disregard for

the rules of others, and your fearlessness, may bring you into positions which you would give anything to get out of; may give you knowledge which will be a stain on your mind."

"I am not afraid. The evil that exists, if I do not cause it myself, may sadden, but cannot hurt me. I want to know human hearts when they are free of their masks."

"It will be an edifying thing!"

"When I understand, I shall never make light of, or laugh at, what is painful, or talk like an idiot."

"Oh, I am so tired!" she said suddenly. "I hope we are near home."

She clung to Clifford's arm. The reaction was strong, her exhaustion extreme.

"Yes," he said, "we are here now, at your home. We can get across this stile. Stay, I'll lift you."

She did not resist.

"There is only that little field, and then I'll leave you at your back door."

When they reached the house, Clifford detained her with counsel—she was to go to bed and take a hot drink.

"You are talking like an old nurse," she said, laughing. "I am only a little tired."

She held his hand, and seemed unwilling to part from him. Suddenly she bent and kissed his hand.

"I believe you saved my life, Guy. Thank you."

She turned instantly into the kitchen. He was too confused to follow her. He wanted to rush in and carry her upstairs; he wanted to watch by her, and see that there were no ill effects from the day's danger, to sooth her if she were restless, to tell her that she was not alone in the world, but the door closed, and he was parted from her. Not more parted from her, after all, than he always was, than he had been when he held her in his arms; for what is more lonely than to cry out, and receive no answer, to crave hopelessly for that which is beyond one's reach? Well, there was no use in wailing over it. A man was a fool who wailed over things.

Then, as Clifford thought over the day's events, his brows contracted with anger. That the taint of a life like Jessie's should come near Nora made him wild. Why should the

woman have pitched upon him to tell lies about? He had less connection with her than any man in the place. He had not treated her badly in any way. He must go and see her, and put a stop to these lies. Yet he could not threaten or ill-use any woman, if she were the most abandoned in the world. The few words he had spoken just now, had burst from him in a rage. He prided himself on never having behaved meanly or dishonourably to a woman. A man might be wild, he had always thought, but that was no reason why he should not act like a gentleman. There were women and women; and he had never selfishly spoiled any woman's life. They had been willing to be loved by him, and willing to be forgotten. He had left no ache in their hearts, nor (he thought with a smile) in his own. Quite away and apart from such passages in his life was his love for Nora. Nor did he think that his careless pleasure with other women made him in any wise unworthy of Nora. But now into curious contact the two parts of his life had been brought, and it annoyed him exceedingly. This unpleasantness arose possibly from the foolish way Nora mixed with the villagers.

After all, a woman must not subject herself to insolence by being familiar with those beneath her. He was no narrow-minded fool, but he must always believe in the old-fashioned notions, that a woman ought to be kept ignorant of many things in life. Then, as a little recoil of thought, came the remembrance that Nora was not ignorant of life, and was likely to be less so, and yet (his face softened and his eyes glowed) he could swear there was no nobler, purer woman living.

CHAPTER IX.

LURED, NOT ENTHRALLED.

A FEW days of fever and after-exhaustion followed that "peril by sea," and Nora was shut out from action for a while. She did not escape thought; it pursued her and became sick with the body's sickness. Allan and Evelyn turned into figures that beckoned. Her own hopes and desires changed into green waves, which rose high above her head and threatened to sweep over her. Clifford seemed to stretch over the world, and to move through her life a colossus, whose gaze she could never flee from. On the house tops and at the street corners some voice, she could not silence, seemed to proclaim through her lips that Evelyn was false; the waves sang it mournfully, and the winds carried it round to every cottage and whispered it through every lattice.

At last these night-mares of fever passed away. Nora came back to the visible world, and in the days of exhaustion she thought calmly. She would not avoid Evelyn any more; she would judge her from her own lips, her own looks, not from idle stories or deceitful appearances.

The days when Nora had made this resolution, and before she was forced to act upon it, were days of peace. But life was moving on, events were growing while Nora lay ill.

Clifford came many times to inquire for Nora and to try if he could see her, but Catherine always received him. To Catherine he gave a modified account of Nora's adventures. He said that Nora's boat had upset, and that a fisherman, with his assistance, had saved her. Clifford laughed a good deal over the accident, and made light of it.

Hitherto Clifford had been quite indifferent as to any comments which might be passed upon his admiration for a woman, but now he guarded the secret of his love for Nora from every one.

Observing and acute as Catherine was, she could not lead him into any expression of his

feelings. She told him that Nora was very ill, and she watched his face as she spoke. He simply expressed such anxiety as any friend might have felt. She talked of Nora's strange ways and free manners. He only laughed lightly, as if it were a matter of no importance to him. So Catherine was confirmed in her notion that the love was all on Nora's side, and that Clifford was merely attracted by her because his vanity was flattered.

Each time that Clifford came to inquire for Nora, he lingered at The Dell. The drawing-room always looked inviting; there was a bright fire, flowers on the table which perfumed the air, and Catherine was amusing. If there was any piquant bit of scandal or gossip afloat in the neighbourhood Catherine was the first to know it. She gave Clifford ludicrous descriptions of scenes with her admirers. The vicar's gallantry, even Armfield's devotion did not escape her sarcasm. And seeing that she took all admiration thus lightly, and seemed only to care for the moment's pleasure, Clifford readily continued his attention to her. She was a handsome woman. She knew how to make herself appear to the best advantage, and her

passion for Clifford was growing so strong that he was unconsciously influenced by it. He felt a certain intoxication in her presence. Something undefined led him to be familiar in his manners to her, to hold her hand unnecessarily long, to speak flattering words, and give her still more flattering glances.

Having once assumed the position of an adorer, it is difficult to draw back therefrom, especially with a woman like Catherine, whose nature is to lure, not to repulse. But even while Clifford felt Catherine's attraction, he lingered at The Dell chiefly because he knew that Nora was in the house. It was a delight to him to feel that he was under the same roof with her, to hear her name mentioned, to think that while she lay ill in her little room he was not far from her.

Catherine was engaged to Trevor Armfield, but they had agreed to keep the engagement secret at present. She meant to make it known when it suited her so to do. She would tell Evelyn Holt at a time when the latter thought she had secured the master of Armfield Towers; she would tell Clifford, if he tried to trick her, when she had led him on

and roused his passionate nature to madness. Catherine felt that if some things in life disappointed her, she could counterbalance her pains by her triumphs. She had a nature which could sympathize with the fiendish delight of Nero in fiddling while Rome was burning. She was utterly unscrupulous. These interviews with Clifford fed her passion for him. She felt he must be her slave, sooner or later.

Nora was nearly well, but had not left her room on one of the days that Clifford came to inquire for her. Catherine, sitting near him on the sofa in the drawing-room, thought that as Clifford would have no excuse for coming soon again, it might be a long time before she could see him. The thought oppressed her. Why should she not create some tie between them, which would make it easy for him to return? Why should she not tell him that she loved him, that she was engaged to Trevor Armfield, and that she was miserable? Surely, if she admitted her attachment, he would confide in her, he would trust her; and even if he did not love her, she might gain such a place in his life that in time she could conquer.

It was growing dusk on this winter's evening, and the fire-light threw a glow over the room. It softened Catherine's face, and her eyes, as she looked at Clifford, seemed full of passionate tenderness. She held his hand—that had become a habit.

"I suppose," she said, with a smile, "now that Nora is well again, you will not come? I shall miss your visits."

"Is it true?" he answered. "I am very flattered. You have no idea how easily touched I am by a woman's kindness. I shan't forget yours."

"I want to be your friend," she said, leaning a little towards him. "I know a great deal more about you than you imagine, and I think I can be of use to you, only you must trust me. Will you trust me?"

Her face was close to his. Her eyes looked in his eyes. If he had yielded to his impulse he would have taken her in his arms. Yet Clifford was not for a moment unfaithful in thought to Nora; but there were two natures in the man, and Catherine, at this moment, was a temptress, a maddening temptress.

"Trust you? Yes," he said, and his eyes

reflected the ardour of her own; "but I've nothing to confide. I am what you see me—a dare-devil sailor. Here to-day and away to-morrow."

"No; there is a great deal in your life that you conceal; a great deal that I know. Shall I tell you how I know?"

Her power at this moment was great. He felt an overpowering desire to cover her with kisses; yet this was merely an instinct, such as urged him oftentimes to yield to a craving for wine, though he knew that the next day would bring self-contempt and anger at his folly.

"No," she continued, "you won't ask me; you understand. I am going to be frank. It is strange that I feel I must tell you everything. I am engaged to Trevor Armfield."

Clifford started. It was a surprise to him.

"It is not to be known at present," she added. "I trust you."

"Well, I hope you'll be happy," he said quietly; "but, to tell you the truth, I don't like the fellow."

"He *hates* you," she said quickly, "and would do you harm if he could. Won't you trust me, so that I may warn you always?"

Clifford thrust her hands from him and rose to his feet.

"You don't know me, my dear girl," he said roughly. "I'm not afraid of any man living, and if the squire thinks he can interfere with me, he'll very soon find out that he'll get the worst of it. Probably he has no wish to meddle with me. I can't see why the man should hate me."

"Can't you?" Catherine rose now and stood close to Clifford. She breathed quickly, and her face flushed. "Don't you know?" she said in a whisper. "Don't you see? I am a fool, a mad fool. Of course, I love you, I worship you; I'd follow you through the world if you would let me!"

Then she laughed harshly, and wrung her hands together till they pained her.

Clifford's answer was to take her in his arms and kiss her long and passionately.

At length he released her, and said quickly—

"By Jove, I could not help it! You must forgive me. I do not love you. I can't be scoundrel enough to pretend it. You fascinate me, you madden me—that's all."

He spoke very quickly, and seemed strangely

agitated. "And, after all," he added, "you will love me for a week or a month—not much longer."

"Shall I? We'll see," she answered.

"Upon my soul, Catherine," he said, drawing near to her again, "it is good of you to care for me. Perhaps some day I may show you that I'm not ungrateful. I'm not such a brute as not to be touched and sorry that you should waste your love on me."

"You'll come and see me sometimes? You'll help me to bear life? Some day I must marry Mr. Armfield."

"As long as you are free, as long as you are Catherine Severne, I'll come as often as you like, though I can't, for the life of me, see what good I can do you; but if you marry you must stick to your husband. I never was inclined to run after another man's wife."

"Do you think I'll ask you? Only be kind to me now."

Clifford looked at her in silence for a minute. He was not a man who—for himself—was cautious. What did he care about entanglements; but something whispered to him to-day to keep aloof from Catherine

Severne, and, for a minute, he listened to the whisper. It was rare for Clifford to feel a second's misgiving on any subject.

"I told you I was a rough sailor," he said. "I don't know how to tone down things so as to make them sound agreeable. Let me tell you it's a dangerous game to ask me to come and see you and to be kind to you. You are a woman towards whom a man can't feel cold. You are not a prudish icicle; and you are very handsome. Do you understand me? I might come too often, for, mind you, I do not love you."

The last words were spoken firmly and slowly.

Catherine laughed. Clifford had admitted her power.

"I'll take the consequences," she said passionately. "I love you."

Then she locked her arms round his neck, and Clifford heard no more warning whispers.

As Catherine clung to him, she felt as though she defied any power to take him from her. She had a sort of savage delight as she held him to her heart; and she swore to herself that, as long as she lived, whether he loved or hated her, she would be a real power in his life, an inseparable portion of his existence.

She lingeringly unclasped her hands, and now, as she stood by Clifford's side, the fire leaped into a broad flame and showed the evil beauty of her face. She laughed as Clifford looked at her.

"I'm not silly and sentimental, thank God," she said. "I'll take what joy I can get. I am not inclined to bore you; so now good-bye. Come again soon."

Clifford felt dismissed. He was not inclined to stay. He felt puzzled by this strange woman.

"I'll come when you like," he said; "it's the least I can do. You have only to say, come. But, upon my soul, child, I'm not worth thinking about."

Then he went, and Catherine tried to calm herself, for she expected Trevor Armfield to dinner.

If Guy Clifford had loved her, if he had only loved her, she thought again and again. Some strange new feeling had been awakened in that moment when his arms had been round her. She seemed to recognize what other women might feel; she seemed to have a momentary link with happy lives and

generous human thoughts; for an instant she seemed transformed in soul. But now, as she paced the room to and fro, she changed rapidly to her own familiar self.

Clifford did not love her. She was no more to him than any other woman, who was young and good looking. Well, she would hold him by the power she possessed. As to Trevor, she was not so clumsy as to let that uninteresting prize escape her. She was excited. She sat down at the piano and sang. Singing was always an outlet to her feelings; and, when in this mood, her song sounded like a musical form of a wild cry. There was a strange fierceness in her tone, a sort of exultation. Nora heard her voice, as she sat by her fire reading, and she involuntarily raised her hands to her ears to shut out the sound. The words of her book ceased to have any meaning to her; all that Nora felt conscious of was the wild, savage song which came from Catherine's lips.

CHAPTER X.

IF HONOUR CALLS.

THE next day, Nora went out with the intention of going to see Evelyn. Physical weakness seemed to give her a kind of calm, in which she could judge more impartially, in which she could not be carried away by her indignant love for Allan or impatience at anything like deception. She had not answered Allan's letter yet; she must see Evelyn first. It seemed quite a long time to Nora since she had been taking part in life. The budding trees, the grass, the sky, had a new aspect to her. It is sweet to feel the west wind blow across your face, after even a few days' illness; to hear sounds in the air, which were mute for you for a while; to feel a new wonder at the beauty of the earth; but when you think that no soul is glad because of your gladness, then

there is a sob in the west wind, and an autumn cadence in the spring's melody.

Who was there that cared, thought Nora, whether she was afoot again, taking pleasure in nature and life? She would walk towards the sea before going to see Evelyn. She longed to breathe the sea air and to look on the waves, which were dear to her as ever, though they had nearly swept her young life away.

After she had crossed a field, and gone a little way on the high road, she saw Jessie Lawless, walking at a short distance in front of her. The girl seemed to walk wearily; her head was bent; there was an expression of utter dejection in her whole figure. A sudden feeling of sympathy, a sudden desire to be kind to her came into Nora's heart. She called to Jessie. The latter turned, and suddenly assumed the defiant expression which Nora had often seen in her face. It did not repel Nora to-day.

"Jessie," she said, "I am going as far as the shore. Will you come with me?"

The girl stared at her for a moment.

"Bless me!" she said roughly. "You can't want to walk with me!"

"Why not?" Nora said impatiently, and her blue eyes looked at Jessie in their steady, fearless way. "You told me a lie the other day. I don't know why you did it; but I suppose you were wild or unhappy about something. I am not at all like the vicar, Jessie."

Then Nora began to laugh.

"Yes, it was a lie," Jessie said impetuously. "Your sister put me up to it. I'm not a good woman—Lord bless you, no!—but I'm not a devil, like your sister. She paid me for it, of course. I'd do anything for money."

"I wonder is that true, Jessie?" Nora said musingly.

Jessie nodded.

"Listen to me," Nora continued. "I don't like you much; you say things that I don't wish to hear; you look reckless and wicked; but, for all that, it is selfish and stupid of me to avoid you. I have no right to make your life worse by giving myself airs and thinking you are not fit to be spoken to. Can't I help you?"

"No," she said harshly, angrily; "no one can help me. That's all over long ago; but I

swear I'll never tell you lies again, and may be I'll do you a good turn some day."

She turned abruptly to the left, where the road branched off to the village, and Nora found herself alone. The latter walked on, and before she had gone far she saw Clifford coming towards her. His eyes were on the ground, and he was carelessly flicking with his stick the grass by the road side. Suddenly he looked up, and saw Nora.

"I was going to inquire for you; but I am glad to meet you out," he said eagerly. "You have been ill," he added anxiously. "They said you had a bad cold; but I can see it has not been only that."

"It has been," she said, smiling, "a recovery from drowning, I suppose. But here I am, really alive; and it seems so long ago since I was out that I find the trees and clouds and everything beautiful."

"Where are you bound for, if I may ask?"

"I am going to see Evelyn Holt."

"You'll not find her at home; I just passed her riding with Armfield."

"Is Mr. Armfield really in love with her?" Nora asked quickly.

"What a rum question! How can I tell? I know of no infallible signs by which I can judge such cases. And why do you want to know, Nora?"

"It sounds like silly curiosity; but I really want to know."

"Is every one so interested in the squire? Is money, and is position, perfectly irresistible to all women?" he asked sharply.

"I suppose so," she answered, not thinking of herself at all.

"That is the reason men like Armfield become such damned, selfish, unprincipled scoundrels. Women pet them and worship them, and they never know their right place. Let them have three months before the mast, and they'll soon learn their value!

"That's too trying a test for ordinary capacities."

"You are laughing at me."

"It is odd how each would try his fellows by his own profession or pursuit."

They had come to the path which led to the sea.

"You are not going to Miss Holt?"

"Not just now. I will go to the sea."

"May I walk with you?"

"If you like."

How impossible Clifford found it to talk freely and easily to Nora. He, who in the society of other women, was always ready with a jest or compliment, found himself awkward and silent when with Nora.

"I had a letter from Allan this morning,' he said, after a while. "He complains of your not writing to him."

"I cannot write just now."

"He is most excited about everything in Rome; launches out into descriptions of pictures, and breaks off suddenly, saying that I don't know anything about it. Let me read you a bit of his letter; there is something about you in it."

Clifford took the letter from his pocket, and read:—"'There, I've done, for you know and care as little about art as I do about navigation. I think Nora Severne would understand best, and would share my enthusiasm; but it is not always——'"

Guy stopped suddenly.

"Won't you finish the sentence, or is it not meant for me?" Nora said quietly.

He looked confused; but, as he was unwilling Nora should think that he and Allan said anything of her which they did not wish her to hear, he continued—

"'But it is not always those who have the keenest intellectual sympathy with you whom you most desire and long for.'"

Clifford folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket.

"Allan is right," Nora said, after a moment's silence.

Clifford looked perplexed and uncomfortable.

"Did you think I should be hurt at Allan's not longing for my presence? It would not be reasonable of me—would it?"

She looked at him, smiling and without embarrassment. Though all the world should talk of Allan, the man whom she loved was unknown to them, unknown to himself perhaps.

"It is reasonable enough to think that every one must wish for your presence," he said impetuously, "as natural as to wish for a fair wind at sea."

"And the other women in the world?"

"I forget them."

"You are a sailor; but your friend is not."

"No, and consequently does not see breakers ahead. We both know who it is that Allan thinks of, and she is not worth his thoughts."

"You mean Evelyn Holt. Don't let us talk of her. I get so confused if I hear what every one thinks of every one. Why should I be biassed by you in my opinion of Evelyn Holt or any one else? It's a mistake to discuss people. If you tell me what you think of Evelyn, of Catherine, of Allan, I may remember what you have said perhaps at some moment when your ideas should not influence me at all. I don't want to be haunted through life by other people's thoughts."

"More than half the men and women in the world would be dumb, if you cut them off from the delights of gossip! You take life much too seriously, Nora. It's not natural or healthy."

"Do I? I think not; only I lose patience with people sometimes."

"It's a very jolly world, Nora, if we are not too stupid to recognize it. Sailing the *Sunlight*, with a good spanking breeze in one's favour, how can one be gloomy? Of course

I have troubles to bear, especially one" (he looked at her as he said this), "which worries me always; but I don't lose hope about it, nor let it make me a poor complaining wretch. By George! if I did, I should not be fit for good luck if it came!"

They had reached the shore. Nora felt she could not talk to Clifford any longer. This man loved her, had saved her life, and she did not even know how to be polite to him to-day! What was the matter with her? She must dismiss Clifford, lest she should hurt him by her impatient words.

"Will you leave me?" she said. "Things are worrying me so, I cannot talk. It is not nice of me to tell you to go; but I say things as they come. Do you mind?"

"Not I. We are too good friends to squabble for nothing. Let me see you sometimes at Wreck Cottage. I like to be near you, Nora; to look in your sweet face, to see your eyes. I am not exacting; but this much I want—I *must* have, and you won't refuse. Good-bye, dear."

He wrung her hand and left her, and in a few minutes Nora was walking rapidly to Sea

View. She was weak and excited. Her conversation with Jessie; her conversation with Clifford; her desire to act faithfully to Allan, whom she loved with a love which seemed to grow stronger every day, in spite of its apparent hopelessness; her wish to be just to Evelyn; the thoughts of Catherine, which were forced upon her—all this made her brain whirl.

She was admitted at once to Sea View. Just as she entered the hall, some one came to the door, and Nora, wishing to leave the servant free to attend to the new comer, said she would announce herself. The drawing-room was divided in half by a heavy curtain, which on cold days was generally closed. Nora entered this room, approached the curtain, and drew it aside. She had no suspicion that Evelyn was not alone, and a pang of real regret at the confirmation of her fears, of real sorrow at the proof of Evelyn's treachery, shot through Nora's heart, as her eyes rested on the scene before her. Evelyn was still in her riding-habit. She was standing beside Armfield, and her head was on his shoulder. In an instant, at the sound of the curtain being drawn, they had changed their position. They

could easily suppose that they had not been seen; but in that instant Nora noticed the tender flush on Evelyn's cheek, the loving glance of her liquid eyes, the trusting abandonment of her whole attitude, and Nora seemed to measure in that instant the nature which could find ever fresh delight in each new lover.

Mr. Armfield took his leave at once, and in a few minutes Evelyn and Nora were alone. The latter did not give Evelyn time to speak.

"Will you write to Allan to-day," she said quietly, "and tell him that you made a mistake when you promised to love him always, and that some one else has won your heart?"

Evelyn opened her eyes very wide.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean, that you have deceived Allan long enough. It can't be real love you have for him, or you would never want any other. Have the courage to be truthful, Evelyn. The pain you'll give Allan now will be nothing compared to the harm you'll do yourself and him, if you let him slowly find out for himself that you are untrue to him."

"You are quite tiresome, Nora," she

answered, with the peevish irritation of a child. "You come and make grand speeches and interfere about what does not concern you. I treated you as a friend, and allowed you to be intimate with me, and you take advantage of that to scold."

"Will you write to Allan and tell him?"

"No! no! no!"—with increasing emphasis. "Of course, I tell Allan everything; and, of course, I'll not write letters at your dictation."

"Then, I shall write."

"You can make mischief, if you like; only I don't think you'll be able to do so, for Allan will believe *me*."

"Don't you see, I can't help it—that I *must* tell Allan; that I, his best friend, cannot see him tricked? You might have twenty lovers, and I should not blame you; but you must not pretend to a man like Allan that he is the only one. Surely truth and honour are worth something!"

"I think I have as much truth and honour as you have; and I know what I ought to say to Allan, and what I ought not to say to him."

"Then you won't tell him?"

"No."

"I will."

"It is a shame to tease me," Evelyn burst out petulantly. "I am not a great strong creature, who can bear all sorts of things, and fight for myself; everything upsets me and makes me ill, and you ought to have more consideration."

"I suppose you can't help it," Nora said in a weary tone; "but you have no right to destroy a man's life; and I can't help my nature, and must keep faith with my friend. Good-bye."

"You can be as unkind as you like; you can twist and turn things so as to make me seem bad, but you'll not gain much by it, I'm sure."

Then they parted; and when Nora had gone, Evelyn looked for some time at a beautiful ring on her finger, which was a new possession, then sat down and wrote to Allan. She told him that Nora was probably writing stories about her, and that he was not to believe them; that there was no doubt Mr. Armfield was very fond of her, but she could not help that, etc., etc. Evelyn added many loving little words, and suggestions that Allan

should give up his madness about art, which could never lead to anything, and that he should come back and be a clergyman for her sake.

As Evelyn read the letter over, she felt sure that she had only to smile in Allan's face and caress him, and he would be ready to trust her again and be her slave. She was too silly to recognize that a noble-minded man may trust blindly, may deem it dishonourable to have a moment's doubt of the woman he loves, so long as there is no real cause for suspicion; but that a man of intelligence, being once called upon to exercise his observation, will pierce through paltry deceits and read the truth swiftly.

The letter which Evelyn thought so judicious was destined to do her fatal harm.

Nora, with fixed purpose, left Sea View, and walked to Wreck Cottage. She wanted to see old Jos; she wanted to be in the presence of her best friend.

"Oh, I'm glad to get back to you," she said, as she entered the cottage. "This is the only place that seems happy."

She put a log on the fire; she took up the

book which Thornton had been reading, and began to read it aloud; then suddenly she put the book down.

"I'm sick of scheming and shams. Why can't people be what they are? How it puzzles and worries me!"

Old Jos smiled.

"You'll go on all your life, lass, trying to understand, and trying to set things right, and you'll go to your grave puzzled. We can never understand."

"I want to write a letter," Nora said, not heeding him. "I want to write it here, in the only place that seems truthful."

"I have not written a letter for five years, but perhaps I'll find you a sheet of paper."

Thornton turned out the contents of a table drawer, and at last discovered a sheet of note paper.

Nora sat down, and, without a moment's hesitation, she wrote this letter to Allan:—

"I have not written to you, because I have felt uncertain what I ought to do. I feel uncertain no longer. You asked me to tell you about Evelyn. Day after day Trevor Armfield is with her. Does she love him, or

does she love you, or does she love any one? I don't know. I have said I would write to you."

This was all. Nora closed the letter without reading it over.

"What does it matter about results?" she said aloud. "I must not think of them." Then she laid her hand on the letter, and said, "I don't know what these few words may bring, but I think I've done rightly. I think the motive was single and true."

"Rubbish, child," old Thornton said, with a laugh. "There are all sorts of feelings mixed up in the simplest act. I believe," he added, "I must give up trying to make a man of you. You are a woman through and through; and, in spite of old Jos' hatred to petticoats, he would not change you if he could."

Nora did not answer. She was thinking of her letter, accompanying it on its journey, seeing Allan receive it, open it, and read it.

"You were nearly drowned, I hear," continued Thornton.

"Yes," she said, coming back to her actual surroundings; "and Mr. Clifford saved my life."

"He did not tell me that."

"Yes; I owe him a great debt, don't I?"

"You can't owe your life to a better lad."

"I don't know," she said impatiently. "We all see people differently. Good-bye. I am going." She rose as she spoke. "I'm restless. I'll come again to-morrow, when I'll be like myself; to-day, I don't know who I am."

She left the cottage. Life seemed to be going all wrong—all wrong.

Nora posted her letter, and, as she did so, she felt that from this trivial act might follow a whole future of pain. She returned home, crushed, broken, unlike her vigorous, buoyant self, though there seemed no real reason for the change.

CHAPTER XI.

A FOOL'S VICTIM.

A MONTH passed, and no word came from Allan to any one at Cairn Cove. The *Sunlight* had been laid up for repairs, and this detained Clifford on shore longer than usual. He lodged at the Sea Gull; and here, from time to time, he received little anonymous letters, warning him against the surveillance of the coastguard officers and against the squire's malicious hatred of him. The writing was not at all like Catherine's, or Clifford would have felt sure that these letters came from her. The only effect they had on him was, that he was tempted, in defiance of Armfield, to seek Catherine's society more and more. During this weary month, Nora was strangely abrupt in manner to every one, and the contrast between her indifference and Catherine's strong,

though somewhat material, love for him, made Clifford idle away many an hour alone with the latter. He yielded himself to the evil fascination, and failed to see the true nature of the woman who blinded him by her apparent devotion. Armfield, angry with Catherine for favouring Clifford, and yet flattering himself that he was secure of her, played with Evelyn for his own pleasure and Catherine's annoyance; and all the while the latter was slowly gathering up the threads of their several destinies, and was plotting so to twist and entangle them that she might hereafter rejoice in her work.

Suddenly, one day in April, Allan Moore, without any previous notice, appeared at the Vicarage. He remained alone in his room for some hours; then, without seeing his father, he went out. He was going to Evelyn.

It was a lovely spring afternoon. There had been heavy rain all through the night, and now the sun shone. It was Sunday. The village bell had ceased to ring, and Allan knew that most people had gone to church. Perhaps Evelyn had gone too. But he would not delay; he would chance seeing her, and

if he found her alone, it would perhaps be the best opportunity he could have of speaking to her undisturbed. He tried to calm himself; he told himself he was calm, quite calm. He did not walk very fast to the doctor's house. He noticed that many fishermen were sitting at their doors, playing with their children, some smoking their pipes with contentment, their eyes closed. He began mechanically to count the cottages where the owners were enjoying their Sunday thus, and the cottages whose doors were closed, their owners having answered the summons to prayer. He began to think bitterly that perhaps those who were kneeling in God's house were the liars and hypocrites; and those who despised form, and made no profession of religion, were the honest and true.

He scarcely knew why he thought all this now. He walked more slowly as he approached the doctor's house, and when he was near enough just to see the white walls, he stopped, and thought of all the happy hours spent within them; hours of perfect and bright on-looking; hours perhaps the most exquisite in life, because full of the poetry of imagi-

native love, of unattained desire; hours which could never come again.

As Allan stood still, looking at this house, once the temple of love, now but an unsightly building, which held a corpse, the corpse of dead hopes, he saw the door open and Armfield walk out. Allan could not be mistaken, it was Trevor Armfield. He whistled to his dog, a great ill-looking hound, which came slouching round the corner; then he turned away in the opposite direction to that from which Allan was coming. Without further halt, the latter walked up to the hall door and rang.

"Miss Holt is at home," he said, when the servant opened the door; and without another word, not heeding the girl's astonished expression, he walked past her into the little study, where he felt sure he should find Evelyn.

Yes, she was there, half reclining on a sofa, as usual; a large bowl of hot-house flowers was on the table beside her; a rose was in her hair; she was slightly flushed; she looked as frail and pretty as ever, and was daintily dressed in velvet and much lace. Allan noticed all this

in an instant, and, with his lips pressed close together, he prayed that he might not, in his wrath, be too harsh, too brutal, to this girl, whom he had so loved, and who had so lied to him.

Evelyn gave a little startled cry when she saw Allan, then rose at once with a look of gladness, even stretching her arms to him. He pushed her away from him roughly, he would not be degraded by her touch.

"Please sit down, Evelyn," he said in a hoarse voice; "you must not kiss me."

She turned pale and did not speak.

"I have loved you, we have been engaged to each other, and you have deceived me. You have walked with Armfield, ridden with Armfield, passed hours and hours alone with him, till it is the common talk of the village that he is your lover. What intimacy you have permitted to him, God only knows!"

Evelyn flushed up angrily.

"You must not speak in that way, it is cruel and ungentlemanly. You would not dare to do so if papa were here."

"I would say this if the whole parish were here. It sounds coarse, but what does that

matter? Treachery is much worse, treachery is the basest of all things. What does it matter to me if you merely listen to Armfield's words of love, and give no acknowledgment with your lips, when your heart has been false to me? Can it make it any worse if your arms have been round his neck and he has kissed you? There is no medium in truth and honour."

"These are Nora's tales that you've heard," she said quickly. "You don't ask me to defend myself. You condemn me without knowing anything about it. You believe the statement of some one who, I suppose, has a spite against me."

"Defend yourself, then," he said quietly; "and, lest you should be led into any fresh untruth, I may as well say that I've just seen Armfield leave the house."

"Men are so hard and so cruel," she said, crumpling up the lace on her dress nervously; "they don't understand. Mr. Armfield loves me —yes. He is very desperate about me; and I've tried to be kind, and to make it better for him."

Her voice faltered a little, but no word of help came from Allan.

"Of course, I told him that I was engaged to you, and that I loved you. I could not have allowed him to come, if he had not known this. I thought there could be no harm if he knew, and I did it for the best. I wanted to be kind to him; he was so unhappy."

"And were you fool enough to think that, seeing him day after day, and being kind to him, as you call it, would make it easier for him, would make him love you less? You knew every day that it was growing worse and worse; but it was pleasant to you, that is the truth. And you thought it was more your duty to be kind, with a false kindness, to a man who loved you, with a mad, selfish, animal passion—yes, I will say it plainly—than truthful to a man who loved you tenderly, faithfully, and who had based his life on your love."

Here, for a second, his voice softened, and he turned his head away; but the fever of bitter anger dried up the tears which struggled to come to his eyes, and in a moment he was as hard, as unflinching in face and voice, as before.

"There was but one course for you, and you knew it. There is not a human creature that,

at one moment, does not know the right thing to do, however men and women may blind themselves with lies afterwards. The one course for you was to tell Mr. Armfield that you were my promised wife, and then dismiss him for ever; if, after that, your heart wavered, you ought to have told me."

"It is very wise to think of all this now. I have thought of it now, but not at the right moment. I think, too, that it's cowardly to dismiss a man who loves you, as if it were no matter at all, and to tell him that he may bear all the trouble of it, and that you don't care a bit, and I could not do it; and he was so kind, and so——"

"Evelyn," Allan said sternly, "do you love this man?"

She looked up into his eyes in a startled way, and, reading the relentless sadness, the changed thoughts of life, in his drawn features and feverish lips, she was frightened at her own work, and thought to patch up the broken faith by fresh untruthfulness.

"You know, I've loved you, Allan," she said entreatingly, "and kept our engagement a secret, lest papa should try to separate us;

and I did so hope you would make up your mind and go into the Church, and then we could tell people, and be together; and you seemed to think so much more of what you called your conscience, than of my suspense and my love, and you hesitated. Then you went away to Rome and left me, and cared more about stupid pictures and art than about me, when you knew I was so delicate I might not live till you came back."

She paused an instant, and gave a little sob.

"And," she continued, "it was natural I should begin to doubt a little if you loved me so very much. And then there was Mr. Armfield, who would give up anything in the wide world for me; and I could not be cruel to him, when I seemed so much more to him than to you. I am sure I did not mean to hurt any one; and if you will only be gentle and not look so dreadful——"

And then Evelyn began to cry piteously; but Allan's face did not relent at all.

"Listen to me, Evelyn," he said, after a little silence. "It's no use; your heart has gone from me, and I should never trust you again. You have no strength, no constancy,

no truth. You are a poor, weak girl, even as hosts of others, who like pleasure and love, who wreck men's lives by their pretty faces and sweet ways. You scarcely know the harm you've done; you are too small of soul to know. I'll go now, for I can't trust myself; I may say something worse, and I don't wish to be brutal."

She sprang to her feet. Her tears were gone, and her eyes flashed.

"This is all Nora's doing," she said wrathfully. "She has told you lies about me. Why, I can't think, for I never hurt her; and you are both so strong and so wise you can do no wrong. If she had not interfered, I'd have told you all about it myself, and you would have understood, and been kind. Did you never make mistakes, and were you never foolish yourselves?" she added passionately. "And I am so young, and so ill," she said, in a self-pitying way.

Allan was not touched by all this. He saw her now so differently; her falsehood had opened his eyes. This sadness was all for herself. Now, even after all that he had said, it did not smite her; it gave her no remorse

that she had ruined his life. She was shrinking from his roughness, and thinking of her own feelings. He looked at her in silence; at the white slender hands which had been so often round his neck, at the little head that had nestled on his shoulder, at the lips which had clung so passionately to his when they had parted. A few months, and all that had been forgotten; and she had turned to a man without intellect, without honour, whose low life had marked itself on his face! This was the girl who had been always present to him, whom he had associated with all his thoughts till she had become a part of himself, whom he had worshipped so reverently, lest his more gross man's nature should unwittingly hurt her in word or deed; and now she had given up all this, because she was fearful of wounding the vanity and selfish passion of Armfield!

"I must make you understand," he said fiercely, "what you've done."

He seized her wrist with one hand, and held it as in a vice. His eyes were wild, and, as he spoke, his lips were drawn back in a way which made his face look ghastly. No whining on Evelyn's part, no nervous playing with her

dress, or avoiding his gaze, was now possible; he compelled her to look at him.

"You've taken all gladness, all joy out of my life. I am not a man to forget. You've broken my ideal, my dream of a woman, and made distrust of, and scorn for, your sex enter my soul. Don't think I whine or crave for your caresses. I would not let you touch me for all your beauty. I would not kiss you again, unless it were with a kiss that would insult you, and which I leave to the man you've chosen. As I hold you thus and look at you, I feel there is nothing to regret in losing you. But, remember, you have cursed my life! All the dream and hope and beauty of my youth you've turned into something foul, because you've made a mockery of love, and let me prize and hold most tenderly sacred a sham, a coarse lie. I speak brutally, perhaps. I forget that you are a woman, for all that makes the glory of a woman is not in you."

His voice was not raised, but every word seemed to strike hard; and the concentrated scorn and bitterness of his tone seemed the more fearful because of his habitual gentleness.

In that instant, Evelyn recognized that her

unfaithfulness had indeed wrought some terrible change in him.

As Allan spoke the last words, he loosed her wrist, which he had held tightly, looked at her for a minute in silence, and turned away.

Evelyn saw him go, saw him pass the window, and walk down the village street; then she sank back on the sofa, and began to cry.

She had been very badly treated. Allan had been coarse and ungentlemanly; he had spoken to her as if she were not a lady. The day would come when he would be sorry for it, and would say he was sorry, and they should at least be friends. If Allan did not do this, it was he who had acted badly. He was most unjust. What had she done? He could not know all that had passed between Mr. Armfield and herself; and even if he knew, what had she done? She always reminded Trevor when he was with her that she was engaged to Allan; and if she had kept Trevor's devotion to her a secret, it was only out of consideration to Allan, lest he should be vexed; and this was all the thanks she had got for her thoughtfulness. She felt very wretched,

and she did not deserve to be miserable at all, and she did not know what to do. Should she try to see Allan again and explain? She did not like the look of his face; he must have loved her very much. A little glow of delight in her power shot through Evelyn's heart. But she hated making people miserable, and she hated being miserable herself, and she began to cry again. She wished Trevor would come back, and put his arms round her and comfort her; then she could tell him. He was strong, and a man of the world, not a foolish boy; and he would know what to do and say. She would write to him. So she wiped away her tears, and wrote a little note, and took it to the boy in the surgery, who also was a victim to her allurements, and she induced him to leave his post at the risk of Dr. Holt's displeasure, and speed to Armfield Towers to deliver the note. And then she went back to the study, and, looking at herself in the little mirror over the fireplace, saw that, though she had cried, she was not a fright; but that her sadness rather gave interest to her delicate face, and she felt comforted, and life began to blossom for her again.

There was little probability of Allan Moore returning to express sorrow for his rough words; he was savagely glad to have so spoken. If he had felt a moment's tenderness, he might have entered again into a disgraceful bondage; now he was free. But he felt wild; he could not reason about things. His lips burned, his head swam. He could not tell what day it was, what hour; how long since he had left Rome, and if he had seen any one except Evelyn and Armfield since his return; but he could tell that there were ten buttons on Evelyn's dress, and that she had a rose in her hair. Well, it did not matter what he knew and what he did not know. The only thing he desired was to get away somewhere quietly, so as not to talk wildly before people who did not care, to get away for a while till he could think and see clearly, for time must go by just the same, and he would take breath presently; just now he was choking. He loosened his necktie. He did not know how rapidly he was walking, nor how wild he looked. He went towards the creek. He did not know why he went there. Something in the freedom and loneliness of the sea perhaps

attracted him. He formed no plan; he walked on. He did not think of killing himself. If any one had expressed a fear of that, he would have laughed in such a one's face. He walked on till he reached the creek, and stood on the beach, looking out on the sea without any thought of further action; for what was there to do? He felt, in this moment of his supremest pain, the beauty of earth and sky and sea with a force which he had perhaps never known before. The soft, fresh breeze, which held the coming odours of summer without its satiated weariness; the setting sun, towards which the waves seemed to leap that they might catch its glory, and carry it into their dark depths; the green billows of the distant fields upon the hills; the defiant outline of the dark cliffs; and the immensity of blue ether, which stretched above, beyond, around like a divine smile, encircling, blessing, far as eye could reach. All this, and a thousand beauties no word could tell of, thrilled through Allan's soul, and with them the love, the passion, the poetry which increased their exquisiteness; all thrilled and flashed through him like the light of memory the moment

before death, then seemed to perish, leaving only gloom.

As all this beauty faded out, one object only remained before Allan's eyes. This was the *Sunlight*, whose sails were half set, and from whose decks came the sound of sailors' voices, as they heaved the anchor up.

Allan started forward, and gave a hoarse call. The sound, caught by the wind, was borne to the vessel; and Clifford, looking to the shore, saw Allan signalling. He sent off a boat at once, though they were almost under way; and in less than a quarter of an hour Allan was standing on board the *Sunlight*.

"Hullo! old fellow," said Clifford, "this is lucky. I did not think you had come back. Why, what the devil's the matter with you?" he added. "Are you drunk, or what's up?"

"I am all right," said Allan quietly. "Don't delay starting; I am going with you."

Guy understood at once.

"Very well. Make yourself useful. Lay hold of that rope—will you?"

Before he could say anything, Allan found himself at the end of a string of sailors, working like the rest.

"Let go the mainsheet," shouted Clifford.

Then he stood on the poop, and gave orders to the steersman. The anchor was stowed, the sails filled with the breeze, the ship's head came round, and she bore out to sea. There was a slight swell and a favourable wind. Before long the *Sunlight* was well away from shore. Allan joined the sailors, and worked with them, being for the most part in the way; but when they could, they good-naturedly showed him what to do. Some hours passed, all were busy on board, and Allan mechanically helped them. At length, Clifford, having left Smashing Jack on watch, went to his cabin, and ordered supper for Allan and himself. He generally supped with the men.

Allan drank much wine; but it did not excite him. His face wore the same fixed expression. Suddenly Clifford leaned across the table.

"Allan," he said, "I had better know about this. Speak of it as much or as little as you like, and then close the subject for ever."

"Yes."

"Evelyn Holt has played you false, and you have broken with her?"

"Yes. But more than this, Clifford," Allan burst out bitterly; "those words don't explain it. She has taken all my most sacred thoughts, and has defiled them; blotted out the ideal I dreamed of, formed my life by, worshipped. She has wasted my love, thrown it down to trample on with her lover, and all the while the only result she feared, from this devil's game that she has been playing, was that she might have a headache!" He gave a short, scornful laugh. "I want you to understand, Guy, what I think of her, and I want you to remember it. I don't hate her; but the thought of her curdles my blood with disgust, and it maddens me to think that she was my choice, that *that* was what I loved. No extenuation, or explanation, or lying excuses can make me change my mind about it. I know I'm excited now, that I can think of nothing else, that every little word and act of the past comes back as a hideous farce; and that not alone is woman's love at an end for me, but it seems that work, faith, life altogether has become a wreck." He went on feverishly, not pausing a moment, not allowing Guy to speak. "I've got a reserve of strength somewhere

though, and before long I shall be able to meet her, and look in her face without any feeling but the contempt she deserves."

"Don't be too hard on her, Moore," said Clifford. "Honour is rare, and the little grain of it which most people possess is mightily often dissolved by cowardice. The whole of life is not made up of a woman's love. By the Lord, if it were, we'd have a damned hard time of it! I take it, this will be the saving of you, and, say what you like, though I'm sorry for you, old chap, I'm glad of the event. Why, a woman like that would drain all the energy out of a man and make a drivelling idiot of him before long! Now, we'll say no more about it, and as you've come on board without paying your passage, I'll make you work like a nigger. By George! the time is not far off for you to work. Do you hear that sob in the wind? I thought we should come in for it; but I'm a little out in my reckoning. I calculated that the wind would not veer for another hour."

As he spoke, Clifford was putting on a thick pilot coat and a sou'wester.

"Here, Allan," he added, "on with this."

He handed him a coat like his own. Moore obeyed him mechanically.

"And now," Clifford continued, "come up on deck; and, mind you, if it blows a whole gale, I can't look after you. You'll have to look sharp and not get washed overboard, for though the world does not look very lively for you just now, there's plenty of good in it; and if you were lost, as sure as fate they'd say you had drowned yourself for love of a worthless flirt. So look to your reputation, my lad, and remember that Guy Clifford would not be much account without you."

Then he ran on deck, followed by Allan.

As the night advanced, the storm steadily increased, growing hourly more destructive in its wrath. Allan worked like the rest—cutting the rigging, clearing the deck, furling the sails. Not a detail of all the wild splendour of the storm escaped him, but never was he one instant free from the remembrance of the girl who had betrayed him. He was glad of the excitement, of the raging blast, the fury of the waves, and the consciousness of danger which lasted through many hours; but steadily fixed was the feeling that, beyond this night there

y a blank—days and nights and years swept
ıre of all interest, days and nights and years
be lived through.

When dawn came, Clifford saw signs of the
nd abating, and sighted the French coast;
t for three hours more he could not leave his
st, for navigation was perilous work while
e waves were still striking the ship heavily,
d she had lost her rudder.

Now and then, Guy glanced round to look
r Allan, and saw with satisfaction that he
ıs working with the crew. In the morning,
ifford missed him, but had not time to look
ter him till later on, when some of the damage
the cutter had been temporarily repaired,
d when they were in a fair way of making
— harbour. Then he went in search of his
end. He was not on deck; the men had not
en him for some time. Clifford ran below,
ıd there, at the foot of the companion ladder,
y Allan. Guy seized him roughly by the
oulder, and shook him. Allan groaned, but
d not open his eyes; then Guy saw that he
as hurt or ill. He lifted him like a child in
s arms, and carried him to his cabin. His
othes were soaked through by the sea and the

rain; he was in a state of insensibility, his eyes were half open, his teeth clenched; moreover, Clifford saw with horror that his leg was broken. He had evidently fallen down the companion ladder, and lain in a state of unconsciousness since the accident.

"Poor old chap!" thought Clifford. "It will be a couple of hours, at least, before I can get a tinkering old French surgeon to set the leg; and the poor devil will suffer the tortures of the damned from the leg being left so long unset. By George! I'll study surgery myself. I dare say I'd be master of the science in a year. He's going to be very ill," thought Guy, looking at him carefully; "going to have some fever—brain, most likely. What shall I do when I run into harbour? Send for his father? No, by George! He'll let everything out when he gets a bit delirious; and I'm blessed if that old hypocrite shall have the benefit of it."

All this time Clifford was undressing Allan with skill and tenderness—had cut the boot off the fractured leg, and had done everything to give him ease; but he did not try to bring him back to consciousness. Guy called one of the sailors after this, and left him to watch

Allan. Walter Haworth was rather a pet of Clifford's, but he was mindful not to show his partiality for him before the other men.

"As soon as we get into harbour, Haworth," Clifford said to him, "we must get Moore out of this. If he is ill in this stuffy hole, he'll die. You and I can manage him. He must be got into the town. We'll bring him to the Quatre Saisons, and if my little friend Hortense is there still, she'll nurse him."

So it was arranged; and scarcely was the *Sunlight* moored when they got him on shore. Allan had recovered consciousness, or rather he had come out of his state of insensibility, but he was delirious. Starting up from time to time, he inquired feverishly which was the first train from Rome, and then dropped down again from the agony of his broken leg.

Smashing Jack stood on deck and watched the two men carry Allan from the ship, and as he watched, he growled—

"I think it would be a damned sight better if the skipper would attend to his duty instead of nursing cripples. By God! he is not fit to be the master of a smuggling cutter."

CHAPTER XII.

THE VICAR'S INDIGNATION.

ALLAN'S sudden arrival at the Vicarage on Sunday morning, followed by his sudden disappearance from Cairn Cove, caused intense excitement. His father having been at church at the time Allan returned home, he had not seen him; and the servant's account of Allan was, of course, exaggerated, though even her fancy could not add much beyond truth to the description of his wild, haggard aspect. No one had passed Allan after he turned away from the village down the road to the creek, so there was no reliable information to be obtained as to the direction he took on leaving the doctor's house, though rumours were not wanting that he had flung himself over the cliff; that he had retired to the studio, and

vn his brains out, and had of course mys-
ously provided for the concealment of his
y. He was distinctly traced to Sea View ;
the maid there had readily added her item
evidence, that Mr. Allan had come to see
s Holt, and had passed through the hall in
ıad sort of way, and gone into the study,
ere there had been high words between the
).

)wing to all these reports, the Rev. Simeon
ore came, in the evening, to the doctor's
ıse in search of his son, and having heard
n the maid her fragment of the story, which,
do her justice, grew hourly more dramatic,
requested to see Miss Holt.

)r. Holt was in the room when the vicar
ı announced, and Evelyn, who guessed the
se of his visit, said sweetly to her father
t she should like to have a little chat with
Moore alone, and asked the doctor if he
ıld mind leaving them. Dr. Holt, who was
irely engrossed by the cerebral affection of
ase, concluded at once that the vicar had
ıe to give a little religious instruction to
elyn, so he acquiesced in her request, and
red, saying he would return by-and-by.

Evelyn, though not a woman of much mental grasp, was full of expedients.

"You have come to speak to me about your son, have you not?" she said at once. "He is not ill, I hope; I should be so sorry."

"I do not know if he is ill," Mr. Moore answered severely, arranging his clerical tie as he spoke. "I do not know where he is. I have come to ask you to explain why he called on you to-day; to ask you to throw some light on his extraordinary conduct."

Evelyn looked down and blushed, then she began timidly—

"You know, I am not obliged to explain at all, but I should like to tell you. You must not be cross, no one is cross with me."

Here she paused.

"I trust," said Mr. Moore, "that I know how to act towards a lady. I will not, of course, withhold just condemnation; it would not be becoming a minister of the gospel; but I trust also I can show due forbearance."

"I am sure you are very kind; and you will see that I've tried to do right."

Another little pause, and then Evelyn, looking up appealingly at Mr. Moore, went on—

"You must know that, some time ago, Allan was foolish enough to fall in love with me. I was very fond of him, and we talked over it quite wisely; and I thought it was better not to say anything about it, for we were both so young."

"There was no engagement?" the vicar said hastily.

"Oh yes, there was. Allan so insisted on it, I had to give in."

"I ought to have been told."

"I thought it better not to speak, because I did not really think we should ever be married, and it would not have been fair to either of us that all the world should know. I saw that Allan was wavering about going into the Church, and I knew how much you wished it, so I used all my influence to persuade him. I even hinted that I could never be his wife unless he became a clergyman; but it was no use. I thought it would unsettle him to go to Italy, and I advised him to pass his examination first, and travel after he was ordained; but he would go. Naturally, I began to think he could not love me very much, if he would not listen to me. While he was away, some ill-

natured person wrote to tell him some absurd story about my flirting with Mr. Armfield, and forgetting him. Allan came back to-day, I believe, and he came here. He was very violent; he quite frightened me. Of course, I broke our engagement; and he went away. I am sure I have tried to be kind; but all this has made me very ill."

This Evelyn related in a gentle, purring way, and with a childlike simplicity. At the end she looked very wistfully at the vicar, as if claiming his sympathy.

"It's all a very silly business," he said, "very silly. I dare say you have tried to do what is right; but I ought to have been consulted in the first instance, and then things could never have come to this. You have distinctly put an end to any engagement, or any nonsense of that sort, I trust?"

"Oh yes."

"That's right. Of course such a thing is out of the question, though I consider my son is worthy of any young lady, and he shall be a clergyman, without doubt, and a very distinguished one."

The vicar was divided between delight at

Allan being free from a penniless girl, and indignation at Evelyn's thinking lightly of such a loss.

"I think it is very hard, that no one seems to think of me at all," Evelyn said peevishly.

It had been a trying day for her. Her letter to Squire Armfield had only brought an abrupt reply, that he was sorry it would be impossible for him to go and see her that day; and this had distressed her much. Then her brothers had made playful allusions to the necessity of being off with the old love before she was on with the new. Now the vicar had come, and though she had shown him most plainly that she had only thought of him and Allan, and not at all of herself, yet he had an air as if she were of no importance; and really, a girl who had made two men desperate was not such an insignificant creature, and she felt tempted to prove it so.

"My dear young lady," the vicar said patronizingly, "I assure you, I feel for you extremely."

Here he took her hand in his. He had found, by experience in the fulfilment of his ministerial duties, that, with women, it created

a feeling of confidence in his divine mission to hold their hands.

"But you must remember," he continued, "I am upset and anxious about my son. I hope you will always look upon me as your friend, and in future confide in me entirely. I expect you to promise that, if Allan should return and try to renew his connection with you, that you will at once tell me. It would be most foolish of you to encourage him. It would be years and years before there could be any possibility of his marrying you, and you would waste your youth waiting; and before Allan was in a position to have a wife his feelings might change."

Evelyn did not like all this candour. As a return for it she said quietly—

"I am sure Allan will never be a clergyman."

"There, I think, you are singularly mistaken."

Mr. Moore spoke with sharpness, and relinquished Evelyn's hand, which he had been holding in such a fatherly way.

"I know how to put the pressure on," he continued, "and a clergyman Allan shall be."

His long upper lip was closed on the under,

very determinedly; he had lost that benign aspect which was the admiration of his flock.

After a moment's silence he said—

"Who was the person, if I may ask, who wrote to Allan respecting your conduct?"

"Nora Severne."

"What do you suppose was her motive for doing so?"

The vicar again took Evelyn's hand affectionately.

"I don't know, except that she and your son are great friends, and she wished to put herself forward as a most truthful person."

"You do not suspect that she herself has any fancy for Allan, any jealousy of you?"

Evelyn laughed.

"No, she is not that kind of girl; she is very cold and strange. They write to one another; but Allan never had any fancy of that sort for Nora. I have often seen their letters. Allan could not love me and be attracted by a girl like Nora."

A smile came on the vicar's lips. Perhaps he remembered how varied had been his taste in his youth.

"Miss Nora Severne," he said, "is in every

way a most objectionable girl, and I am not surprised to hear anything bad of her. She associates with a low class of fisher people and miners, is the constant companion of that atheist, Josiah Thornton, and, sad to say, she never goes to church. I hope you will take warning by her, my dear, and follow the right path. It is true," he continued, after a moment's pause, "that this Miss Severne gives alms—I will not say is charitable—and teaches the children some useful things, and has the reputation of being kind to the poor; but when not guided in a right channel by the true faith, all this is hurtful, encourages idleness and begging. It is only a well-regulated Christian mind that can draw the line and resist appeals which are not based on truth."

Evelyn was getting very tired of the vicar. She had produced on him the impression she desired, and now she wished he would go. To her delight her father came in, and the vicar rose.

"I am pleased, my dear sir," the latter said, "to find your daughter so straightforward and right-minded. She has been foolish, perhaps,

in the matter of this engagement to my son."

Poor Doctor Holt looked in amazement from one to the other.

"But, thank God, it is all at an end. Your daughter will explain. I must go now to Miss Nora Severne, to interrogate her on certain matters. I wish you good evening," he added, before Doctor Holt could reply, extending his hand first to Evelyn and then to her father; "and I pray the Almighty to send his blessing on this house."

He took his hat with an air of having done his duty, and went out, leaving Evelyn much discomfited at being foreed to explain matters to her father.

This "objectionable girl," Nora Severne, the vicar would find to be a different sort of person from Miss Holt.

After leaving the doctor's house, he walked straight to The Dell. He felt that he was bringing every one's true character to light, and covering the guilty with confusion. A man of his upright character and thoroughly orthodox principles could always penetrate a mystery.

Nora was sitting in her beloved library. She was idle. It was nearly dark, but she had not lighted her candles. She was looking out and watching the gathering clouds, and her thoughts were stormy on this April night. She had heard that Allan Moore had come and gone. That was all she knew. No word from Allan; no word from Evelyn. If he had gone away, it surely meant that all was at an end between him and Evelyn, and Nora rejoiced. She rejoiced, not because Allan's freedom would bring him one whit nearer to her, but because he was no longer bound to one who was unworthy of his love. Nora had long ago sifted her motives in telling Allan of Evelyn's treachery, and she had found no grain of jealousy or selfishness in them. Why should she question herself any more?

The door opened, and the Rev. Mr. Moore was announced. His first act was to stumble over a chair in the dark, and just save himself from falling by clutching a table. This was undignified, and irritated him extremely. It was discourteous of any one to receive a visitor in the dark; it was more than that, it was improper. He pulled his tie straight, and

requested Miss Severne to be good enough to light some candles.

"I hope you did not hurt yourself," she said, as she struck a match.

"No, no," he answered, "it is nothing of importance."

Nora asked him to sit down, but they did not shake hands. The vicar's patronizing manner deserted him. Something in Nora's bearing, her full, firm gaze, made him ill at ease.

"Do you know anything of my son?" he said abruptly.

"No."

She sat down opposite to him as she spoke.

"Yet you have been in correspondence with him."

"Yes."

The conversation did not advance much. The vicar grew angry. Bland suavity with Nora was impossible.

"It is an unusual—I may say unmaidenly—thing to correspond with a man who is neither your brother nor your *fiancé*." (He pronounced it feeawnsee.)

Nora's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"I see no wrong in it," she said very quietly, "nor do I wish you to tell me what you think of it."

"It concerns my son, and I have a right to say what I like."

"To your son, perhaps."

"And to you, too. Are you not one of my parishioners, one of the souls committed to my charge? I do not require you to teach me my duty."

He felt himself rising superior to the impertinence of this girl.

Nora smiled slightly. The vicar was becoming rather ridiculous.

"I live in your parish, it is true; but I do not belong to your congregation. I never go to you for religious advice. I fancy I should differ from you on every point, so I'd much prefer that you should speak to me only on the subject which made you come here. Can I tell you anything about Allan? Can I help you in any way?"

"You know best," he answered sharply. "You write to him—very improperly, as I think—you are very intimate with him, so much so that you repeat to him malicious

andal about Miss Holt, who seems to me a odest, right-minded young lady. In con-equence of your report, my son comes home, reaks his engagement, which I cannot regret, s he has no right to engage himself without is father's consent, and then disappears. Now, Miss Severne," he added, "perhaps you will indly inform me where my son is at present, s, no doubt, you are acquainted with his ddress."

The Rev. Simeon Moore was feeling more omfortable; the consciousness of covering the uilty with confusion was returning to his erical breast.

"I do not know where he is; I wish I did," ora said eagerly. She was too anxious about llan now to notice Mr. Moore's foolish im-oliteness. "He may have returned to Rome," e added. "What do you think can have ppened?"

"Since you cannot give me any informa-on," he answered, rising, "I will leave you. nless your conscience accuses you of having terfered maliciously, and driven my son to me wild act, I do not see how his absence ncerns you."

"It concerns me," said Nora, standing opposite to him, with flashing eyes, for she was now fairly roused, "because I am fond of your son, because we are good, true friends; and if you had any real tenderness in your heart, you would be glad that others should love him, and be interested in him—you would be glad to share your anxiety with those who care for Allan."

The vicar looked confused. His intelligence did not fit him to meet such an attack as this.

"I know I ought not to speak in this way," she went on impetuously; "it is not good manners, I suppose. But if you could only be a friend to Allan just now, and not say things which have no meaning at all, you might save him from so much wretchedness. If he goes into the Church, it will kill all the goodness that is in his heart."

While she spoke her eyes were fixed on the vicar's face, and, watching its expression, she read the mind of the man: the narrow intelligence, which could not for a minute realize how through the long past the one Eternal Spirit had breathed life into the heart worship of millions, whatever the outward form of

adoration; the self-satisfied blindness, which had made itself a way of salvation out of the consciences of others; the nature which could not do a kind act swiftly, but would pause always to weigh it by some empty law; the soul which was so filled with delight in its own nothingness, that it was empty of all noble aspiration, and incapable of recognizing it in others. All this Nora saw plainly, and she knew there was little hope of help for Allan from his father.

"Ah, it's no use," she said quickly. "I don't think you know Allan, and I am sure he does not know you; it can't be helped. He must fight his own battle. You will help him most by your silence."

Nora was looking out into the darkness; her head was turned away from Mr. Moore.

"You need not teach me my duty to my son," he said angrily. "You seem to forget to whom you are speaking."

She turned towards him.

"I am very sorry. I am only a girl. It must sound impertinent; and it's no use."

In the impetuosity of youth, she wanted to tell him all she thought; to show him how,

here in Cairn Cove, he had passed by the doors where he ought to have entered and helped, because he could not recognize what was real sorrow. Nora wished the vicar would go now. If he stayed longer, she could not control the outburst of words which rose to her lips. She remembered the sickly artisan and his wife, for whom she had appealed in vain, who, because through sickness and apathy they had sunk into idleness, and lived on irregular work and chance charity, were styled by the vicar "thoroughly unworthy people," and were left to linger on the borders of starvation by him, while he made friends of those whose apathy and idleness, however much indulged, could not, on account of the accident of birth, bring them to like straits. Nora remembered, too, the young girl whose love and weakness had brought her into trouble and disgrace, and knew how the vicar, when she turned to him in distress, had increased the burden she had to bear by his worldly morality and hypocritical virtue. Nora had lived amongst the poor, had played with the children, helped the women, talked to the men, and she could find no trace of the vicar's noble influence, no growth of

true piety from his counsel, no growth of brotherly love from his example; only a few natures, to whom the weekly sermon was an ordinary habit, like the mending of their clothes, or cleaning of their house, found the existence of a clergyman at Cairn Cove a satisfaction. The finer natures, the souls of even slightly heroic mould, were untouched by the vicar's presence, and running sometimes to wild ways, as such natures often will, were even helped to waste their vital energy in evil directions by the manifestation of an unreal religion, which appealed to their sense of scorn. All this, and much more, Nora thought of with a wild desire to say it all—to force the recognition of the true and false on this man, who claimed to be the messenger of God, so that in this moment of his son's trouble he might have some sense of awe at the mystery of life, and the unmeasured depths of an ardent soul, wounded so vitally as Allan was, and that, understanding all this, he might refrain from cant and mistaken parental authority, and so leave Allan something to trust to when so much else had been shattered.

This trembled on Nora's lips; but, looking at

Mr. Moore, she knew she must not say it, and in the tempest of her feeling she pushed the library window open, and went out into the night, muttering to herself—

"He could not understand—he could not understand."

CHAPTER XIII.

WELL MATCHED.

THE vicar stood still for a few minutes in utter amazement, when Nora vanished; then he turned to go.

"The girl is mad," he muttered to himself—"quite mad."

He felt injured at being allowed to go away thus unceremoniously, and to let himself out of the house unattended. There was a degree of deference due to every one, but specially to a clergyman. The vicar walked slowly down the passage to the hall door. He felt a desire to explain to some one, even to the servant, that he had been treated with disrespect. He was pleased to see the drawing-room door open, and to see Catherine advance towards him.

"Ah, Mr. Moore," she said, "where have

you sprung from? Won't you come in and talk to me?"

Catherine liked to make herself mistress of every situation. She had, by a near approach to the library door, overheard most of the conversation between Nora and the vicar; she now thought she would complete her comprehension of what was going on by a few words with Mr. Moore.

"I am distressed about my son," he answered, "and cannot stay."

Notwithstanding, he entered the open door, and glanced round.

"I have been," he continued, "talking to your sister relative to my son's disappearance. She cannot or will not give me any information. If you will excuse my saying so, I think your sister is strange; I should say more than strange."

Catherine laughed.

"Mad, you mean? Well, no, she's not. She is spiteful. She does not enjoy life, and she does not wish other people to enjoy it. Won't you sit down?"

"Well, for a moment."

Mr. Moore selected the most comfortable

hair he could see, and placed his hat on the floor beside him. The room, though small, was well furnished, well lighted. He thought many a pleasant hour might be passed there. A girl left alone in the world, with a mad step-sister, required a counsellor; the Rev. Simeon Moore thought he could fill that vacant post admirably. If Allan was fool enough to have fallen in love with any one, why could he not have loved this girl? She had not a pretty doll's face, like Miss Holt; but she was a fine woman, and had some money. He would be agreeable to her. Perhaps he might divert Allan's thoughts in this direction. At Allan's age, any comely, amiable young woman was attractive; at least, it had been so in his own case, and all men were alike in these things.

"I wish, Miss Severne," the vicar said, in his most fascinating manner, "that I could apply to you for information about my son instead of to your sister. You have, thanks to your estimable aunt, been most carefully brought up, and have some idea of what is due to yourself and others; but your sister—it is quite lamentable!"

Here he raised his hands and eyes.

"Has any one run away with Mr. All Moore? What has happened?"

"Have you not heard? I thought the whole neighbourhood knew of his impatient foolishness."

"I am not a gossip, Mr. Moore."

"I do not hint such a thing; but every one seems to know that Allan arrived this morning, had a stormy interview with the doctor's daughter, and has disappeared."

"Miss Holt!" Catherine said, with well-feigned astonishment.

"Allan was engaged to Miss Holt. I thought it probable that every one knew of his engagement, except his father. In consequence of Miss Holt's light conduct, reported to him by your sister, it seems that Allan hurried home, has broken off his engagement, and disappeared. I wish it to be distinctly understood and known that he has broken off this foolish engagement. I had it from the young lady's own lips."

"And do you know who is the successful rival—who it is that Miss Holt prefers to your son?"

As she spoke, her voice sounded unpleasantly metallic, and she glanced towards the recess of the window, now concealed by thick curtains, which were drawn across it.

"I forget."

"It might be as well to know. We hear of such things as men taking vengeance on their rivals; and though your son is not very muscular"—here she laughed—"and does not look as if he could horsewhip any one, still he may be in pursuit of his rival."

She leaned back in her chair, and glanced again towards the window.

"Indeed, it might be so. You are very intelligent, Miss Severne. I did hear the man's name; but I was agitated; I did not give heed."

"Try to remember. There are so few available men at Cairn Cove, I should think Miss Holt would only relinquish your son for a man of position."

"You think so? I fancied Miss Holt was a singularly gentle, innocent, unworldly girl."

"Perhaps so. But who was the man? Let us think. Could it be Squire Armfield?"

"Of course—yes. How could I forget was the squire?"

Catherine's eyes flashed, and a burning s[illegible] came on her cheek.

"And the squire means to marry Mi[illegible] Holt?"

"I should think not. A man of his position is not likely to marry a penniless doctor's daughter; and, if he draws back, I cannot say I pity her. It is the just reward of deceit, to be deceived."

The vicar sat very upright as he said this. The application of a moral law to others always gave him an exaltation of feeling.

"I must thank you," he continued, "for your courtesy and excellent sense. It would be as well, perhaps, that I should see Mr. Armfield, and warn him, in case my rash son should seek a quarrel with him. He is a man whom it would not be right to offend; a man of influence, wanting, perhaps, in the spirit of godliness; but his temptations are great, and, whatever the errors of his youth, I have no doubt he will be a religious man, and an excellent member of society, if the Lord should spare him."

"If I may make a suggestion, I should say, to not go to the squire; your son would never attack *him*. Probably, Allan has gone back to Rome. Leave him to himself, and let him learn that people don't trouble themselves about his vagaries, and he'll come back all right. Do not make yourself unhappy about him. He will, no doubt, return repentant, and be ready to agree to your plans, and go into the Church."

"Thank you, dear Miss Severne; thank you for your counsel. You have no idea what a comfort you have been to me in this trying time. I think you are right, and that Allan ought to be left to come to his senses, only I feared to seem indifferent, when I felt so deeply; but you understand my feelings."

There was silence for a few minutes. The vicar folded his hands, and wondered whether Miss Severne would ask him to stay to supper; and Catherine, with an angry glow in her eyes, tapped the floor impatiently with her foot. The vicar thought it best to rise.

"I must go to my lonely home," he said pathetically. "I trust that this visit may be the beginning of a long friendship. I do not

see you often enough. In my position, you will permit me to say that I feel a brotherly interest in you"—he held her hand as he spoke—"perhaps even a tenderer sympathy with you."

Mr. Moore smiled affectionately.

Full of other thoughts though she was, Catherine appeciated the vicar's admiration. He was old and very ugly, but she liked an acknowledgment of her power from any one.

"You will come and see me soon again," she said, "and tell me what news you have. I might find out something from Nora, perhaps. I have ways of finding out things. Good-night."

A moment longer the vicar pressed Catherine's hand, and then took his leave, with a glance of increased affection.

Catherine stood still till she heard the hall door close, then she drew back the curtain across the window, and disclosed Trevor Armfield sitting in the recess, looking extremely sleepy.

"Upon my soul," he said, yawning, "I thought you would never let the old fool go. I believe you rather liked his flattery."

"'I always like admiration; but I did not keep the vicar for that reason. I kept him that I might hear about you, and that you might know that I had heard."

"Are you cross, because I flirted with Evelyn Holt?" Armfield answered, with a laugh. "Of course I flirted with the little idiot."

Catherine grew more angry at Armfield's careless manner, but she would not show her anger. She had much worldly wisdom, and knew she was playing for high stakes.

"I know you are pretty lax in your notions. I should like to find out what you think you may *not* do."

"Marry Evelyn Holt; that I most certainly may *not* do."

He laughed.

"But she expects you to marry her, since she has broken her engagement with Allan."

"Perhaps she does. Girls base their expectations on so little. But, Katie, let's have supper, and I'll tell you all about Evelyn."

"I know," said Armfield, as they sat together in the little dining-room, "that women like to hear about the unrequited love of other women. They like to say, 'Poor things!' Don't they?"

"I am not inclined to pity them; it's their own fault. What fools they must be, if they can't do without any man that was ever created."

"Don't be a hypocrite, Katie; you can't do without me."

As he spoke, he drew his chair a little nearer to hers.

"Tell me about Evelyn," she answered, withdrawing a little from him. "Is she very fond of you? Does she make scenes, and say she is ready to die for you? And how do you look?"

"I look delighted, of course; but I am afraid Evelyn is a woman of the crying type. She may become troublesome, now that she has been fool enough to break off her engagement."

"What will you do? How will you retire gracefully?"

"Explain to her that I can't marry at present—which is true enough, God knows; and then, when the vision of Armfield Towers fades away, I'll find no difficulty in escaping from her love."

Catherine laughed.

"'Is that dingy old mansion of yours so attractive?"

"'Yes, very; specially to Evelyn Holt. Bless my soul, some women take up with a man for his money or position, some because they like lovers, some because they *will* be married; but Trevor Armfield knows the world too well to imagine there's much disinterested affection knocking about."

"And, pray, in what way do you think yourself attractive to me?"

"I'm blessed if I know, except that it's dull at Cairn Cove, and it amuses you to talk to a man of the world. Then, of course, you know, I admire you, and think you not only a fine woman, but, what is rarer, an uncommonly clever woman. It's not the immediate prospect of being mistress of Armfield Towers which fascinates you, for you know well enough that it may be many a long year before we can be married. Will you be content to wait for me, Katie, I wonder?"

He edged his chair a little nearer to her.

Catherine laughed again. This time her laughter continued for some time. After the first moment of this hilarity, Armfield did not

enjoy it. He did not see why the notion of waiting for him should be so utterly ludicrous to Catherine.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked in rather a surly tone.

"The unbounded conceit of men amuses me. They always think that women ought to be quite satisfied to waste all their youth in sentimental fidelity."

"I don't see why it should amuse you," he said, helping himself to wine. "Of course, my marrying at present is out of the question, because of that old uncle of mine. He would cut me off with a shilling, if I married any one who was not highly connected; and the genealogy of your step-sister is not eminently aristocratic! Of course, if I were independent, and my liabilities did not hamper me so confoundedly, it would be a different matter; you know, I'd marry you to-morrow."

"How kind of you! I like my liberty, thank you; I'm not in such a hurry. If you were my husband I might hate you; there's no knowing."

"What an extraordinary woman you are! God bless my soul, I've come across a good

many in my time, but you are not like any of them; you are delightful!" In his enthusiasm he approached her and took her hand.

"Am I? You can tell me that just as well without moving. I am not a clinging type of woman."

"By Jove, you are not."

"It must be a charming change to go from my society to Miss Holt's. But there is one little peculiarity of mine, Trevor, which I'd like you to know."

"What is it? Your peculiarities are charming, Katie. I never saw such a woman."

"This is it," she continued, in a perfectly good-tempered tone of voice, though her eyes flashed; "I won't have my intimacy with any man talked about by him. How can I prevent it? That's my secret. I do not make scenes; I don't urge you to make our engagement known. If you grow tired of me, you are welcome; I'll not persecute you—probably, I'll be tired of you first—but, on the other hand, I must not be talked about. I like my coating of respectability. Why should I be without the garment when other people wear it? I am not such a fool. You sup with

me, and we enjoy ourselves. Good. But the society of Cairn Cove would not approve, and I like to fool society, so it shall not know. Do you agree with me?"

"By Jove, yes! You are monstrous sharp, but can you prevent gossip?"

"Can I prevent you, for instance, telling the next girl you flirt with that you are *au mieux* with Catherine Severne? She smiled as she spoke. I'll explain," she continued. "I can't really prevent you talking; but I can know when you do it, and, knowing it, can give you your *congé*, can perfectly well do without you, and so give the lie to gossip—do you see?"

"Oh yes, I see," Armfield answered, in not at all a delighted tone.

"Women make men disloyal to them," Catherine added, "because they cling to them in an abject way, no matter how men insult them. While a man loves me, and is silent, he attracts me; when he is indifferent and chatters, I don't give him a thought. Why should I? I like a man for the pleasure, not for the pain he gives me; when he hurts me, he can go."

"'You don't *pose* for being disinterested and unselfish, that's plain!"

"'No, there are so many that take up that *rôle*, I don't care to."

"What a splendid actress you would make, Katie. Why don't you go on the stage?"

"I am too lazy, it would bore me; besides, women would hate me, and worry me, and if they crossed my schemes, I might punish them too severely."

"Revengeful, eh?"

"Yes; I fight with what I hate. Why not? Every one does. Do you think any one forgives?"

"How well you look to-night, Katie. I'd forgive you anything. What do you think Cairn Cove would say to these little evenings? What would your sister Nora say?"

"She is mad. When men and women can't recognize that there is a world outside their own brains, they are mad—are they not?"

"I'm blessed if I know. But you are so uncommonly clever, I wish you'd find out something for me."

"What is it? Will it amuse me to find it out?"

"I don't know, I fancy it will. But whether you help me or not, remember this is private."

Catherine nodded.

"I've asked you about this before. You know, I've always had a notion that Guy Clifford is a smuggler. I've suspected it for some time, but have nearly trapped him now. Of course, it's my duty as a magistrate to put a stop to that villainous trade; and Clifford is such an independent scoundrel, has such a damned, insolent manner, as if he were quite above being noticed by men in a higher position, that I'd like to give him a lesson."

"How do you propose that I shall help you?"

"I want to ascertain the exact hour the *Sunlight* is expected off the coast next time she returns from France. If I can only know positively the first night the cutter anchors off the creek, I'm sure of my man, I fancy. Nora will be sure to know. She is always at Wreck Cottage, and Clifford is hand in glove with old Thornton. I have laid my plans, but must have some sort of warning of the *Sunlight's* arrival."

"And you think Nora will tell me?"

"No; but you could find out from her somehow."

"Not from Nora; but there's a better way. I might find out from Guy Clifford. I might make myself very agreeable to him, and he might find me so fascinating that he could not resist telling me his secrets."

"I dare say," said Armfield surlily, "that it would amuse you more than the other plan; but I should not appreciate it."

Catherine laughed.

"What, you surely are not jealous! You flirt with Miss Holt, with any one, and I do not care; why trouble your head about me when I am out of sight. It is not reasonable. You do not wish to marry me at present. I am very amiable when you are here. You cannot expect me to render an account of my sayings and doings when you are absent? How absurd for a man like you!"

"I'm damned if I'll let you make love to other men, Katie. I'd marry you to-morrow, as I said before, if that old uncle would die. I should like to know where I could find a finer woman, or a woman with more brains. A man ought always to marry a woman with brains.

A fool would ruin any man; you are not a fool."

Armfield's enthusiastic admiration was on the increase—it always was after supper.

"No; but your kind intention of marrying me does not make me think I must not speak to any other man. I like you—well, love you—and as long as you make me love you, you need not be jealous of any one, and when you fail to do so you need not be jealous either, for the jealousy of a fiend would not bring me back to you, or prevent me loving any one I chose. *Voilà, mon cher*, those are my sentiments. You dislike Mr. Clifford, I dislike Nora; those we hate are our enemies, they will hurt us if they can. The wise thing to do is to make it impossible for them to hurt us by holding them in our power—is it not?"

"By Jove, yes! Clifford—I'm sick of the name of Clifford. I am squire of the place, and ought to have influence, ought to be looked up to; but I'm baulked in everything by this man. If I want to enclose a common, change the course of a stream, do anything, in fact, which is for the general good, I find there are representations made in opposition to me,

Which I know are got up by this Clifford. Who is this upstart? Does any one know who he is, or where he comes from? He has no stake in the country, holds no property, runs a trading cutter from Cairn Cove to France, and is, I'll swear, a smuggler; despising the laws of his country, and setting me, their administrator, at defiance!"

Armfield, in his righteous wrath, struck the table heavily with his closed hand.

"Gently," said Catherine; "don't be violent. You need not break all the glass on the table to illustrate your hatred of Clifford. Now, tell me your plans, and what you know."

"I can rely on you?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't tell me if you are afraid," she said coolly.

"You won't chatter. I'll tell you. The *Sunlight* is always off the coast at least nine or ten hours before she is announced to have arrived. The landing of the illicit cargo is accomplished at night, of course. Clifford is a devilish good sailor, and he manages the cutter splendidly. He generally chooses a stormy night, he is much more secure from observation.

He has certain signs with his friends on shore. I want to know those signs, and have the coastguard on the alert. There are so few men that they can't be on the look-out from one week's end to another without some clue. I think I've found where they lodge their goods."

"Where?"

"You want to know too much."

Catherine had looked eager for a moment, and Armfield was on his guard; she saw that at once.

"I don't care; that part is unimportant. I'll find out about him, if you like; but in my own way. I don't dislike him. He has power; I like power. I wonder which, you or he, will prove to be the strongest. If Guy Clifford proves the strongest, I'm sure to like him best. I warn you."

"You would prefer being the wife of a smuggling skipper to being the wife of a country gentleman, belonging to one of the oldest families, and holding lands which, if the mortgages were paid off, are worthy of a prince!"

"Wife!" Catherine repeated scornfully. "I was not thinking of being the wife of any one."

She looked at Armfield, knowing well that this indifference on her part was making him her slave, knowing well that, in spite of his worldliness and selfishness, aided even by those vices, he would be ready to do anything to win her.

"You pretend to love me," he said, taking her hand, which she graciously allowed him to hold, "and yet you laugh at the idea of being my wife. I don't say it will be possible for some time; but I like to think you'll be mine one day. By Jove! a good many women would be pleased if I said that to them. You don't seem to care a bit."

He was sitting close to her, and tried to put his arm round her waist. He began to feel that she was the only woman in the world he wished to win; and Catherine knew this. Nevertheless, she repelled his caresses from the calculating instinct of her nature. To yield to the wishes of man or woman, was to place herself in the position of a dependent, not a commander. We yield to what is needful to us; and what we want conquers us, makes us abject in time.

Catherine did not say these things to

herself, but the acceptance of them was rooted in her nature. Thus it was, that, on these evenings at The Dell, Catherine held her lover at arm's length, as it were, and kept her power over him. Rarely he kissed her; and even when he did, the caress was so cut short by her unresponsiveness that her kiss seemed still a joy to be attained. This irreproachable propriety was not the result of virtue, but of calculation. It was admirable, of course, would have met with world-wide approval had it been known, and would have served as an example to women of more impulsive nature; but the truth, if any one could penetrate to it, was that this decorum was the outcome of a base nature. Armfield was unaccustomed to such treatment, and it fascinated him; resistance was a goad to his love. That any woman could hold light the devotion of Trevor Armfield, was so astonishing an experience, that it constituted Catherine at once a woman of no ordinary type, a woman worth winning. The end being attained would incontestibly prove Trevor Armfield to be irresistible!

Eleven o'clock struck, and Catherine rose to dismiss her guest. It was a rule that he

should not stay very late. To-night he was very unwilling to go.

"What a hurry you are in to send me away," he said amorously, looking at her with much admiration.

"No, not particularly; but I am tired, and it is late."

"Won't you put your arms round my neck for once, Katie? Upon my soul, I never loved any woman as I love you. You drive me mad."

She smiled. She allowed him to draw her near to him. The consciousness of her power over him was a delight to her; but scarcely had his lips touched hers when she freed herself from his clasp, swiftly and easily, the movement being unexpected by Armfield. He attempted to take her in his arms again, but she waved him back, looked at him for a moment, then laughed.

"Don't pursue me," she said; "you will make yourself ridiculous."

She laughed again as she ended, then held out her hand, and said good-night.

For an instant Armfield felt inclined to curse her; but he controlled himself.

"You are right; I'll go. We understand each other—don't we? No maudlin sentiment. I hold you to your promise about Guy Clifford. Good-night."

As he left the house, Armfield swore to himself that he would conquer Catherine, swore that the day should come when she should crave for a caress from him, and think it the only thing worth living for.

Catherine sat for some time in the dining-room, thinking over Armfield's words. On the return of the cutter she might have it in her power to betray or to save Clifford. She resolved to make this power a certainty, and smiled as she thought that she would reserve her decision as to which way she would exercise that power.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHANGED WORLD.

t was a strangely chill day for June. The ain was beating against the large windows of hotel at a seaport in the north of France, here the *Sunlight* had put in some six weeks eviously. French houses seem unsuited for eary weather, and, though in the north of ance the climate is by no means kind, there not much protection against its cruelty. It ems as if men here would not accept storm d rain and dreariness as the normal con- ition of things, would not acknowledge by eparation the possibility of its presence. ıe *salle à manger* looked bare and cold, and e windows seemed every moment as though ey would be blown in by the storm, while e rain made a gurgling noise at their base, ıich sounded dismal.

Clifford and Moore were sitting at a little table in the corner of the room. The latter was thinner and whiter than usual.

"I'm not proud of you," Clifford said, leaning his elbows on the table, and looking at him. "I don't think my doctoring will be looked on as a success at Cairn Cove; but I pulled you through, and I kept you from being worried, that's one good thing. I dare say you don't thank me for the former service; you'd have liked to die."

Moore seemed to wince; but he said nothing.

"You see, we are going back to-night, old fellow; and I'd like to have it out with you about one or two things before we go."

Allan continued silent for a few minutes; then said suddenly—

"So you may, Clifford; I am not going to shrink from sore subjects, like a puling girl. Yes, Guy, I should have been glad to die; but I didn't, and my life will probaby be as long as most people's. It will be no shorter because I've loved a woman who has tricked me, has thrown aside my affection and reverence for the love of a sensual beast like Armfield. Look here, Clifford," he added, passing his

hand over his forehead, and pushing his hair back, "I want to know everything about Cairn Cove. I am not afraid to hear anything. I keep thinking that it is six months, not six weeks, since I left, and I imagine a great many things must have happened."

"Nothing particular has happened, as far as I can learn. You have heard from your father, and you know that he continues to instruct his parishioners in godliness, and duly laments the evil ways of his son! Miss Holt still smiles on her admirers. The squire has lingered at his ancestral hall longer than usual; malicious tongues say it is because railway companies do not give credit, and under those conditions it is difficult to travel. Old Jos is pretty tol loll, dear old fellow, and Nora Severne takes care of him. Miss Catherine fulfils all her social duties, and is altogether an estimable person; but I have my own notions about her, which I shall corroborate at leisure. Now, I think, that's all."

"It is not quite pleasant," Allan said bitterly, "to go back to the old place; but I shall not shirk it. I shall hate meeting Evelyn; but it will be unavoidable. I can't sweep her out of

my life. She seemed to me the fulfilment of all my dreams, the perfection of womanhood. Oh, it was marvellous discernment on my part to think thus of her—was it not? I ought to be proud of it! Still it has been, and can never be as if it had not been. I shall go back to Cairn Cove, and meet her. I shall look on her, not as something I grieve to have lost, but as something I loathe to have loved.'

A wild, scornful gleam came in his eyes. He was silent for a moment; then continued—

"I shall not cross her path much. There is no likelihood of Evelyn trying to renew her acquaintance with me, for the work I shall choose will remove me from her social sphere, her sphere of delicate luxury and self-indulgence, of false sensitiveness and affectation."

The veins swelled on his temples, his eyes burned fiercely.

"What the devil are you going to do, Allan?"

"Gratify your prejudices, and refuse to go into the Church," he answered, with a slight smile. "The treachery of a woman, and six weeks' sufferings and reflection, have made me

see things as I could never have seen them if life had gone smoothly. What nonsense it is arguing and persuading and growing impatient with the views of our fellows! Life only teaches. You get hold of a thing all in a minute through *living*. I look back on the past, Clifford, and see myself playing with everything—thinking that life is to be full of beauty and delicate dreaming, that even religion is to be gracefully talked about, and that ignorance, wickedness, poverty, suffering, though it is to be most wisely and kindly dealt with, is to be shut out as much as possible from the thought of the cultured and artistic. The whole of that flimsy tissue, through which I saw life, is torn away. I have not the genius to claim and make for myself the exceptional life of a great artist; I have not the stupidity necessary for a plodding, orthodox clergyman. I must begin low down amongst the toilers, and only raise the place of my labour when I have the capability for higher things."

He leaned back in his chair, and closed his lips tightly. His face had altered much in this short time. There was hard, independent

resolution in his eyes, and a bitter scorn on his lips.

"And when are you going to begin, Allan? Are you prepared for the wrath of your reverend father?"

He looked at Moore as he spoke, noting his frail frame, the feverish glow on his delicate skin.

"I'll begin when I go back to Cairn Cove—I am going to work in the mines, Guy."

He looked at his friend silently. He expected an outburst of either laughter or condemnation from him. After a moment, Clifford said roughly—

"By George! I'm not going to stop *you*. It will kill you, probably. You are not the man for that sort of life; but you must fight the battle your own way."

"There is only one thing that could change my resolution—if my father understands my refusing to enter the Church, and suggests any other profession which I can conscientiously take to; in that case I think it's due to him to consider the matter."

"Oh, if that is the only thing to keep you back, you'll be in the pit before long," Clifford

said, with a toss of his head, as if the idea of the vicar's sympathy was not to be thought of.

"I dare say," Allan said bitterly, "that when Evelyn knows what I've done, she will think the step the result of reckless despair, and it will make a fitting sequel to her romance, giving it a slight flavour of tragedy. I am willing that she should think thus, willing even that she should suppose I am still pining for her love. The reflection will probably be a pleasant one to her. I could go elsewhere," he continued; "there is plenty of work to be done in the world, but I prefer to make the struggle on the old ground. The people there, friends and enemies—perhaps I'm too insignificant for the latter—have been witnesses of my wasted boyhood. If I can do better now, let them be witnesses of the change."

"When you are counting over your friends," said Clifford quietly, "don't forget Nora Severne. She is true, if ever there was a true woman."

Moore frowned, and changed his position uneasily. He felt tempted to let the observation pass without comment; but Clifford was

watching him, and wanting him to speak. Why should he disguise his feeling about Nora?

"It is strange, Clifford," he said, "that since all this wretched business my feeling of warm friendship towards Nora seems to have died out. I am heartily ashamed of myself. I can't account for it; but though Nora has been the means of freeing me from a terrible delusion, and I owe her the greatest gratitude, yet I don't want to see her. It was a kind of thing I did not expect her to do, did not want her to do, and I'd have liked her better if she had not been so clear-sighted, but had been deluded like myself. Do you understand?"

"No, I can't say I do," Clifford answered sharply. "She has acted simply and straightforwardly. Being your friend, how was it possible for her to look on at Evelyn's treachery and be silent? She tried speaking to Evelyn, and, as it was of no use, Nora said plainly what she meant to do—to tell you."

Clifford spoke rapidly, and, for him, excitedly. Moore put his hand to his head wearily.

"You need not defend her, Cliff; she needs no defence. She has acted quite well. Still, I can't help myself; I have a sudden deadness of feeling towards her. Perhaps it will justify itself in the future; perhaps it will go away. I can't tell; one can't explain these things. I am not going to tell you I am a changed man," he continued, after a little silence. "Character does not change ever, and I'm the same, really, as I was before all the beauty of my life broke up; but I am roused." He paused after the word. His lips looked hard, his brows were contracted. "I look on life differently. You will hardly believe it, Clifford; but hitherto I've never tried to form a distinct notion in my mind of the characters of those with whom I've had to deal. My father, for instance. I don't know how he'll treat me when I oppose him. He might fly at my throat in his rage; he might say mildly that he'd like me to please myself. I don't think I should feel astonished at any reception of my resolution. Even you, Guy," he added, with a short laugh, "I've taken to you, and stuck to you; but, upon my soul, I could not have said what I thought specially admirable

in you. I look at you more critically now. You, who have knocked about the world, and have always been keenly observant of men, can scarcely understand me. I have lived, seeing human creatures, the earth, the aims of men and women, everything in a vision of beauty, and with an idiotic conviction that I could make that endure. One thing, the highest and loveliest I dreamed of, has proved base, ugly, false, and the discovery has tainted everything. This shows me to be a much weaker man than I imagined myself to be. It is a diseased vision which sees all things shattered, because of one broken hope. I can no longer beautify my daily life by my own power of thought, no longer glorify the lower elements of being by the higher. My position is reversed; but I can't live without the hope of regaining my real self, therefore I begin by coarse, repulsive work. I place myself face to face with unlovely reality, and try to struggl through it, back to beauty. If I fail to reac it, at least I shall not have been a usel idler. I don't see why I should bore you w all this; but I make no apologies."

"You are quite welcome to say anyt

you like, sane or insane," Clifford answered. "I'll do as a kind of mental log-book for you. Now, I must remind you that we sail at six, so you have an hour to embrace Hortense, and to take farewell of every one."

Clifford stood up as he spoke.

"I think you'll have to take a run somewhere before you turn miner; you don't look quite the thing at present."

"No use opposing the poor fellow," thought Guy, as he left Allan; "but he'll soon break down at that mining game."

Allan rose and stood at the window, looking out. The rain had ceased, but there were little streams and pools of water everywhere, and the clouds hung low, though the wind was trying to sweep away their heavy darkness. He pushed the glass door open, and went out. Everything looked bleak. The leaves blown from the trees by the storm lay scattered on the ground; women were hurrying along with bent heads; only a few children, with sublime indifference to weather, were splashing through the pools of water, and shouting with the inextinguishable joy of childhood.

Here, at this little seaport, during four

weeks of fever and suffering, and during the time of gradual recovery which followed, Allan had fully realized that he had crossed the boundary between happy dreams and waking pain. He looked out on the sea, rough and angry, which separated him from his old home. Cairn Cove would be a new world to him. He would look in Evelyn's eyes and know that she was another being from the woman he had loved. In the future, she could have no power over his soul; but now, in this dismal hour, he abandoned himself to the thought of this love which he had created in his imagination, this wraith which had never known life. The sweet eyes which looked so lovingly, the tender voice which wooed by its very tone, the clinging touch of slender fingers, all were with him now, mocking him, crushing him, hardening him; touching all possible joy with corruption, tainting the very smile of pure women with the blandishments of the harlot, turning all simple devotion into a pretence of love for selfish ends, making it possible to him to trace all noble emotion to a poor or base source, turning all the holy, poetic thoughts of an enthusiastic youth into the dregs of a

material philosophy, which blights an unloved manhood. In what had he failed Evelyn? Not in reverent tenderness, not in swiftly indulging her every wish, not in granting to her in his thoughts every possible beauty of mind, and developing, in his imagination, every germ of intelligence into something remarkable. How had he failed? He had failed as a madman might fail, who, judging everything from his own diseased mind, acts in accordance with his own thought, and makes no allowance for the world outside his brain. But the world—has it any intrinsic existence other than what the minds of men make for it? Is it not fairly fashioned to the noble soul, deformed and hideous to the debased soul? Yes; hitherto he had thought so, but now? Now some devilish element had crept into life, which poisoned thought; or had it always been there, only that he, blinder, more foolish, more unprepared than the veriest dolt that shuffled through life, had given himself to a derision, a lie?

Allan was slowly walking towards the port. The wind blew keener now; it passed over the restless sea and seemed to bear the sea's bitter

strength on its wings. Allan's step quickened, he grew more erect, he breathed the strength of the winds and the waves. This fiend in the world, in the souls of men and women, which resisted him, which mocked him, he would grapple with it, see it as close as could be in all its unloveliness and conquer it. "On ne se réussit dans ce monde qu'à la pointe de l'epée et on meurt les armes à la main."

Allan felt himself altered strangely. It is true that character never changes, but lurking, hidden in every man there is a kind of second self, which fate sometimes calls from its slumber.

Allan was standing on the little pier; he did not know he had reached it, did not know that he was looking at the crew of the *Sunlight* heaving up the anchor; he had forgotten that he was going home, till suddenly Clifford's hand fell on his shoulder.

"Hullo!" he said, "where have you been? I've just run up to the hotel to look for you, and they knew nothing about you. We must look sharp, and not miss the tide."

"Do you mean to say," asked Clifford, as

they went on board, "that you left the inn without bidding Hortense good-bye?"

"I forgot; I was bidding so much else in my life good-bye."

"Well, I call it damned unfeeling of you, after all her attention during your illness."

"So do I, Clifford," Moore answered; "but she won't mind. I must learn that people don't feel very deeply, and they must learn that I don't. I must rough it, Guy, mentally and physically."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST LINK.

THE vicar's reception of his wayward son was extremely pompous. Allan was in the mood to look at every one critically, to find people hurtful, disappointing, and to scorn life as it was, since he could not believe it such as he would have it to be.

Except for a momentary greeting, the vicar and his son did not speak till dinner-time, on the day of Allan's return. As they sat at table, Allan made some slight allusions to the weather, to the fisheries, then to the French town where he had lain ill for six weeks, and to the kindness he had met with. To all this the vicar replied briefly. He wished, as a prelude to a very serious conversation, that his manner should evidence his sorrow and just anger. As soon as the servant had left the

room, Allan launched at once into the subject which was in both their minds.

"I see plainly, father," he said quietly, "that all this conversation we have been carrying on was a pretence. You wish to speak to me on another subject. Will you begin, or shall I?"

Dull of perception though the vicar was, he felt the change in Allan.

"You have always been hitherto mindful of the reverence due to me," he answered. "I regret to observe a change in this respect."

Allan looked astonished; then he pushed his chair a little away from the table and leaned back, his eyes resting on his father's face, and in those moments all the old impressions and influences of his boyhood seemed to pass away.

"There was no want of reverence intended, father," he said. "But quite simply and clearly, we must understand about the future, and the sooner the better."

"Your engagement with Miss Holt is at an end?" Mr. Moore interrupted hastily. "I am not to hear any more of that nonsense?"

Allan flushed angrily.

"My engagement is, as you say, at an end and had you not alluded to it, you would have heard no word from me on the subject."

"There, that's just it, deception and concealment about everything!" burst out the vicar. "Your father, who ought to be the first to know, is the last to know; your father, who has done so much for you, is not to be considered in the least! You have disappointed me, Allan; you have embittered my life."

He helped himself pathetically to port. Allan did not feel remorseful.

"I think it is useless to discuss what is past; I want to talk to you about my future prospects."

"I thought that was all arranged long ago. You go up for your examination next month; you will be ordained next spring, and after that you can assist me in my parish, and gain from me much knowledge, which will enable you to fulfil your ministerial duties efficiently. After some months, you can take a curacy in the country. I should prefer that your curacy should be in the diocese of D——, the bishop being a personal friend of mine, and likely to be of service in your advancement."

Allan allowed his father to run on, he even waited a little after the vicar had ended; at last he said slowly—

"I am sorry to disappoint you, father, but I cannot go into the Church."

"Be good enough to explain yourself. I don't understand you."

"I cannot conscientiously enter any profession for which I am not fitted."

"Preposterous nonsense! No young man is fitted to be a minister of God; but he does his best, and in time, by the Divine grace, he may become worthy. A right-minded man will become beloved and admired by his flock, and will be a blessing to many."

The vicar drew himself up proudly as he said this. He deemed that all these good things were fulfilled in him. He continued, after a minute's pause—

"Humility is, no doubt, a virtue, but a man must not be over timid. What your father is, you may hope to be. You will doubtless have to renounce many pleasures for the sake of example; but, after all, even from a worldly point of view, there is much that is satisfactory in the life of a clergyman. A quiet

home, a comfortable independence, the respect of your fellow-men; I may add, the devotion of refined women, who know how to appreciate culture and intellect. You can have all these pleasures, besides many innocent recreations in moderation, such as shooting, fishing, hunting; but, of course, all these things are secondary—quite secondary.

"Very," Allan said bitterly; "and they are so secondary to me that I will not perjure myself for them. I can't be a clergyman. *I* can't teach others till I teach myself. I *can't* go about lying. I must earn my bread honestly. I cannot be an honest clergyman, so I will not be a clergyman at all. I am sorry to annoy you, father, but I must choose for myself."

The vicar hesitated a moment, not being able so suddenly to grasp the knowledge that Allan purposed to set his authority at nought. His lips twitched a little in weak anger; then he said coarsely—

"It's honest, I suppose, to deceive your father; to let him indulge you in every way, support you, educate you, spend his hard-earned income on you, and all the while to keep it secret that you meant to disobey him! You

have got all you can from me," he added violently, "and now you show your real character!"

Allan's eyes flashed, and the fire of them forced the vicar's gaze to droop for a moment; but Allan quickly checked any outburst of indignation, his anger dropped into the quiet of bitterness. The one cruel sorrow of Evelyn's treachery had dulled the hot impatience of youth, his heart was too sore for hasty words.

"I am very sorry to have been an expense to you, very sorry to disappoint you; but it cannot be helped. I must find some other work."

"And, pray, what is it to be?"

"Is there anything else you would wish me to do? Any other profession you would like me to enter?"

"Well," answered the vicar, striking his hand on the table, and becoming genuine for once, "that is the most confounded impertinence I ever heard! You pretend to consult me when you have resolved to go your own way! You can work at what you please, or starve. I shall not help you. You shall not have a farthing from me. You shall not have the

comfort of my home. You shall go where you please. You are an ungrateful, unnatural son, and until you repent it is my duty, as a father and as a minister of God, to show my condemnation of you."

Allan smiled slightly. The world was growing very empty. He had lost the woman he loved, he had lost his father; who would be the next to go?

"I don't want to be an idler, father, don't imagine it; but I thought that perhaps, though I could not please you by being a clergyman, there might be something else in which I could please you."

"I see, you want to get the credit of being a thoughtful and considerate son; that's what you mean. The only way you can please me is by obeying me. If you won't do this, go your own way. I'll never countenance self-will and selfishness in a child of mine. I should be quite justified in casting you off altogether; my parishioners know my character, and would hold me blameless. No man of feeling would take your part. Only your low companions will applaud you, and I hope you'll be pleased with their applause."

A few months ago these words would have roused Allan to passionate retort; he would probably have been disrespectful, violent in his language, like any thwarted and impetuous youth. Now he strove not to let the affection of his father slip quite from him, strove to keep alive, if it were possible, some faint breath of that love which, in unquestioning childishness, he had always believed must exist between father and son. He drew near the table again, and leaned across it, looking earnestly in the vicar's eyes.

"Do you mean, father, that, if I pursue the course I think right, you will give me up—see me no more? I can scarcely believe it."

"Certainly, I mean it. You think me weaker than I am. I trust I know my duty."

"I see," said Allan, and his voice was cold and bitter in tone, "I've made a mistake about everything. I thought a father's affection could not be broken because of a disagreement; I imagined a parent's love to be something quite different from what it turns out to be in my case. I see, I must start afresh with a set of notions suitable to the world as it really is, or rather, without any standard of feeling or

action other than that which I meet with. I dare say I'll get on famously in this way. I shall begin a new sort of life to-morrow. I leave my old home to-night, and I thank you, before I go, for all your indulgence and kindness. It sounds rather absurd, does it not? I thought kindness could never be disassociated from the mere relation of father and son, and therefore was not a thing to be talked about; but I see now, that was another of my mistakes. I am afraid I shall never get quite free from my old creed. I shall always be ready, if you want me, father; but I'm very different from the man you suppose me to be. I'll never sacrifice my convictions from a cowardly shrinking from hard work and privation—never, so help me God!"

"Your blasphemous calling on God to witness your perversity does not impress me, it shocks me. After thirty years of faithful ministry, I fancy I am more qualified to judge of what is right than a conceited, ignorant youth; and since you set yourself in opposition to my wishes, you can, as I said before, go your own way."

Allan rose.

"I am going," he said, and his pale face flushed a little. "I will not say more. Perhaps we shall not meet for a long time. I suppose you will shake hands, father."

As Allan spoke, he stretched his hand across the table. The vicar looked at him. If there had been any emotion in his son's face; if the vicar could have felt that he was breaking him down, getting the upper hand of him in any way, he might have relented a little; but Allan looked perfectly calm—there was a strange expression in his eyes of having outlived all vivid, excited emotion. His firm bearing and quiet voice roused all the littleness of the vicar's nature.

"No," he answered, "I won't! You are not worthy of it; and some day you will be bitterly sorry for your conduct."

Allan said not a word, but left the room. He told the old housemaid to pack up his small possessions, clothes, books, drawings, and that he would send for them. To her astonished inquiries he would give no answer; but left the house and walked to the studio. There, he could think quietly, fully grasp his position, and decide his future life. He turned his back

on his old home, without any special pang of regret. All mental wailing at any pain life could bring, seemed to have been outworn during those days of suffering in France.

It was a calm, clear night; the smoke rose straight from the village fires, and lost itself far up in the still air.

The workers were at rest. There was *no* true rest, save that which was well earned *by* toil. Had the fishermen, the miners, *the* sailors, time to dwell on broken hopes; time to dream in idleness of beauty and sweetness, sickly in its unreality; time to shudder at unlovely natures, and look out with morbid dread on a world which was suddenly bare of love? Bah! How fine was the honest daily toil and manly endurance of the workers, not thinking of their own capabilities or deserts, but working on! Perhaps a man, cultivated and refined, knowing what was best in thought, might learn much from them of what was best in deed, and so learning and growing strong with their strength, might give to them somewhat in return, and so have peace.

Thus thought Allan on that summer's night, dreaming poetically of the life he was to lead,

even while he persuaded himself he was facing life sternly and practically.

The artistic nature, whether it rise to genius or fall short of it, is a sad inheritance. Always the *ignis fatuus* of exalted feeling and noble motive leads it on, and it is sorely hurt at every step. Tossed from the heights of aspiration to the depths of dejection; tempted at times to cast off its soul's faith, and by degrading itself into forgetfulness to win the peace of dullards; failing to gain the stupid calm of a lower life because of the unquenchable divinity of its intellect, and ever struggling back, panting and weary, into the purer air of spiritual effort. The life of the true artist is a long cry for perfect expression outwardly, of the soul's thought to the whole race of men; is a deep craving inwardly, for a response, for a close mental grasp of another life which will stretch its vision further; and to the true artist the fruition of these two desires is eternally denied. Why, God knows.

Allan was longer than usual in walking from the vicarage to his studio. The beauty of the summer night made him linger. The air seemed infinite in its clear purity, seemed

to stretch around him endlessly, to link him with unknown worlds; and with the sensation of moving in unlimited space came the thought of eternity.

Which of us, he mused scornfully, is worthy of enduring always? What is it we want to continue? Our bodies, of course. We don't really care about our souls; we strive to crush our own and other men's. What arrogant creatures we are to demand immortality! We want to know about it, to feel sure, to prop up our pitiful lives with the certainty that they will last for ever; and we are furious with others and unforgiving if they will not believe, because their unbelief seems to take a little from our security. Poor insolent fools! Can we not see the immortality of men now while we live, if we are not too ignorantly dull? The good deed lives, the loving word lives, the noble art lives; the divinity of man can never die, grows eternally, passes from generation to generation. Will it not satisfy us that all in us that is worth enduring, will endure, will live in other souls imperishably?

The wind rose a little and blew through the trees, the leaves shivered as it passed, and the

clouds gathered towards the south. A slight shudder passed over Allan.

"I suppose I'm too young to be content with it," he thought scornfully; "but toil and isolation from my own class will give me strength in time to live above personal desires. Now"—he paused in his walk, and looked away from the immeasurable vault of heaven to the cluster of cottages which he could see in the distance through the trees—"now, I want individual life and delight, individual love, all that life has brought to other men, and could bring to me—the love of women, the glory of great deeds, unfading joy in the genius of others, the companionship of intellect; I crave for it all, and not for time only, but for ever."

The wind blew keener, the sweet deep blue of the heavens changed to a murky grey. The passionate throb in Allan's heart died down. He shrugged his shoulders, then turned towards the studio, and walked with a quick, vigorous step.

"I've done with dreaming," he muttered. "I ask nothing of life nor of the world, but that which I can wring from it by my own strength, by the force of my own will."

The ladder was down at the studio, Allan ran up it. He groped about to find a match, and presently nearly fell over somebody on the floor.

"Hullo, Allan!" said this somebody; "don't stave in a fellow's ribs, if you can help it; it's not hospitable."

"You, there!" Allan answered. "You are sure to have a match, that's one comfort."

"I suppose you must have it, but I prefer the darkness; it's more conducive to slumber."

Clifford fumbled in his pocket, and after a few minutes found a match and struck it. He looked sharply at Allan, even by that feeble light.

"Now, look alive with a candle. I suppose you've only got a bit the length of a tenpenny nail; but let's have it."

The candle was discovered after a hunt, and proved to be remarkably short.

"That won't last long," said Guy, rubbing his eyes, and looking at it sleepily, "so I vote you light the fire. I can't possibly do it myself, I'm only a guest."

Thereupon he settled himself quietly on the floor again, twisted himself up in a rug he

had found, and gave several grunts of satisfaction.

Allan applied himself to his task. In a short time the fire blazed up, and the studio looked cheerful. He thought Guy was asleep; but, on the contrary, Clifford was watching his friend carefully, and to his surprise said quietly, after a long silence—

"May I ask, Allan, what brings you here at this time of night, and at what hour you mean to return to the paternal roof?"

Allan came from the fire, and sat down opposite to him.

"That's quickly answered. I am not going back to the paternal roof any more; and I am here, because this is my only roost for the time."

Clifford leaned up on his elbow, thrust his hand through his hair, and gave a long whistle.

"Tragic scene, I suppose," he said, with a laugh. "Indignant father—'Never more shall your shadow darken my doors!' Injured son —'Since you wish it so, I leave you for ever to your injustice and cruelty!' My dear fellow, tragedy is a mistake; it is like full

dress, unless on great occasions, rather uncomfortable and a little bit ridiculous."

"We were not tragic, Clifford, nor yet comic. We were very matter of fact. Seeing that I opposed my father, and refused point blank to go into the Church, he is no longer interested in my career, and objects to support me; therefore it becomes clear that I must shift for myself."

"No doubt. But where was the necessity of your flying like a rocket out of your father's house, and leaving a sort of sulphureous, explosive effect after you?"

"I was very distinctly told to go. After that, I fancy you will agree that it was scarcely gentleman-like to remain."

"Is this true, Moore?" Clifford said sharply. "Has your father turned you adrift without a farthing?"

"Strictly true."

"I knew he would act badly, but, by George! I scarcely expected this."

Clifford sprang to his feet as he spoke, and began to walk to and fro.

"How could you foresee how my father would act? What did you know of his

character? I was stupid enough," he continued, without waiting for Clifford's reply, "to have formed no idea of my father other than a typical one. What a fool I've been! *I* can't help laughing at myself; it's positively ludicrous."

Here Allan burst out laughing, but the sound was not merry.

"Well, I'd advise you to clear out of the place altogether. I'll run the *Sunlight* between other ports, if you'll join us."

Allan shook his head.

"I'm going to stay here."

"What rubbish that is," Clifford said angrily. "Voluntarily subjecting yourself to all sorts of annoyances, perhaps painful scenes! It is senseless, it is morbid, it is womanish."

"No, Cliff. Don't imagine I'm going to make a martyr of myself; but I mean to stay here—here, under the eyes of the woman I've loved and the father I've respected, and to let them see my life, whether it be good or bad."

"You are going to work in the mines. Your health will never stand it; you'll break down, as sure as fate."

Clifford still paced the room. There was no smile on his face; he looked angry and impatient.

"Not a bit of it. I'm not going into the mines with the weak notion of working and dying—not at all. I am convinced I shall live." He said these words with emphasis. "I am convinced I shall live," he repeated. "Whether my life will be any advantage to myself or others is a different matter."

Clifford did not look satisfied, but he was silent.

"You do not want to leave Cairn Cove, Guy," Allan said slowly, "yet you offer to leave it for me."

"Well, what of that?" asked Clifford roughly. "There are attractions, old habits, old friends, the allurements of several young women who love me dearly, but I think I could manage to forego all those pleasures."

He laughed as he ended.

"I don't believe I'd do half as much for you, Clifford."

"No, perhaps not; but that's neither here nor there. If you'll come, I'll leave the place. If my mates kick up a row, I can sell my

share in the *Sunlight;* but I'm sure I can manage them."

"I know the particulars of your agreement, and I don't think it would be easy. However, I refuse your offer finally. It seems to me that I have lived a dependent life long enough, and I must stand alone now. Not even to you, Guy, will I look for help!"

"But what the devil makes you go into the mines? Surely it's not to spite Evelyn and your father; to wound their aristocratic, vulgar susceptibilities, by letting them see you a miner. Eh, Moore, that's not it, is it?"

"No; the reason is not quite so paltry; but I must keep it to myself for the present, till I see what resolution and time may bring. Do you mind my not telling you?"

"Oh no. I wish your respected father were in the mines instead of you—that's all."

"And that I were at the vicarage? I should not like the exchange."

"You don't seem to feel indignant or sorry about the whole business. Is this the consequence of being his son? I wonder how one feels towards a father. I had one, I suppose, but I never knew anything about

him. How am I to experience the sensation? If I get a son of my own, that won't help me—will it? That would be reversing the relation. I must give it up. I believe I shall always treat all people according to their natures. That's much the best plan. I don't think I'd love my mother, if I had one, unless I thought well of her. Why the devil should I?"

Allan listened with a slight smile.

"By the way," Clifford said suddenly, "you are going to keep this little crib—are you not?"

"That is one thing I'm not quite decided about yet."

"Well, I am. If you don't keep it, I will. I can't talk to you in a mine!"

Seeing Allan's eyes wandering round the room and lingering on the easels and drawings, Clifford added—

"Sweep everything out of it, if you like."

"Not everything — only some drawings. Let me see, I may as well do this at once."

He brought the largest of his portfolios over to the fire, and, kneeling down, he began to look through the drawings by the flickering light. He picked out four; they were all

drawings of Evelyn. He had pictured her more refined, more loving than she was, with greater depths in her eyes, and more firmness in her lips; he had drawn his dream of Evelyn Holt.

"Come here, Guy," he said quietly.

As Clifford stood beside him, Allan added—

"She was a pretty girl; she was more than that—she was very beautiful."

He spoke of her as if she were dead. Guy shrugged his shoulders.

"She was never like those drawings. You have taken the treachery out of her eyes and lips, and given them a beauty they never had. She has a poor, cowardly face, full of dodges. Upon my soul, Allan, I've known all sorts of women, specially those of not too strict a virtue; but, by George! I've never known one who was so complete a hypocrite, or more capable of coarse intrigue!"

"I dare say it is true," Allan answered, his lips set with an expression of cold scorn; "but it is useless to speak of her. That is her nature. The fault was on my side for seeing her falsely. I am burning these," he continued, putting the drawings in the fire as he

spoke, "not because I fear their rousing any weak or regretful thoughts, but because they are untrue, and have no part in my future life."

He did not watch them burning; he got up, and walked across the studio towards the window.

The wind, which had sprung up when he was walking from the Vicarage, had now risen to a storm. The studio window was shutterless, and Allan could see the tall poplars swayed hither and thither in the gale. The air was full of leaves, blown from their stems and tossed against the panes. Overhead on the slates the heavy branches of an elm swept the roof unceasingly, and the swishing sound was strangely dreary.

Was it only the keen air, whistling through the chinks of the studio's ill-fitting window, which encircled Allan, and made him feel a cold wall of separation between him and his fellow-men, or was it that life had swept away from him for ever the warmth of loving hands, the glow of loving eyes?

Commonplace men and women patch up broken-down places, find substitutes for lost

joys, grieve a little, wildly or weakly, and then somehow restore their life to its former balance of pleasure and pain. With those to whom nature has given a fateful touch of genius, such patching is impossible. They see too clearly to solace themselves with a sham.

Clifford watched Allan as he stood looking out on the storm. No word of Clifford's broke the silence. He thought how differently he would have taken disappointment. Why should a man waste time in lamenting? There was a certain amount of pleasure to be had in life; if not to be found in one direction, it could be found in another. Of course, the world was not perfect, by no means. There were a good many people who wanted kicking to put them in their proper places; but there were also very tolerable people—a great deal of kindness, and plenty of fun. But Clifford did not suggest any of these consolatory views to Allan. The former felt, without any mental acknowledgment of the feeling, that Allan stood on a different platform from him. He watched him uneasily now, for he remembered the days of delirium in France, his wild words and gestures.

There was no fever in Allan's veins to-night; he was quite calm. He was thinking how strangely belief perishes. A few months ago he could have become a clergyman conscientiously, thinking the doctrines he had to teach fitted to the needs of men and divinely inspired, though perhaps imperfect. He would have married Evelyn, and gradually, being closely associated with her, would have accepted a life of superficiality, would have turned his intelligence to writing elegant sermons, and have won a high position in the Church. A pretty wife, wealth, position—how easy, with such wheels to his chariot, to have ridden gracefully through life, and to have accounted, by a few trite laws, for the existence of evil and good! But now, through the treachery of a frivolous girl and the coldness of a selfish parent, his unfounded belief in God and man had perished.

To perfectly unselfish, devoted love, there could never be a satisfying response. When all was given, there was nothing more to expect, and thus fruition was destruction. It was the law of the universe. Only by a cold wisdom, a skilful holding back, could a man

keep his power, could a man bind a woman's wavering mind. Diplomacy in love! Was it possible? The very essence of love is spontaneity—a freedom from calculation.

Not for a moment did Allan Moore, finding his highest desires frustrated, feel tempted to seek for compensation in the pleasures of other men; to snatch lower joys with insatiate longing. If the love of women, wealth, friends, fame, had been all his at a word, he could not have believed in the possibility of happiness. He recognized the inexorable law of change; saw it in the quick-flitting clouds now, as he looked out on the night, in the scattered leaves; heard it in the howl of the wind, in the dreary caw of the rooks in the elms. But he recognized, at the same time, that in bitter irony God had given to some men a changelessness of soul which made them at war with their surroundings—made them a sort of pitiful picture of the perfection which might be in life, and was not.

Allan had lost his belief in love and happiness; but his belief in himself remained, holding him back from all base pleasures, shutting him out from any other life unworthy of his

first high intent, but leaving it bleak and unlovely.

"Clifford," he said, turning round suddenly, "a good fight teaches a man his strength, gives him freedom. I think you pity me. You must not waste your pity. I feel gloriously free. I need not curb my thought to suit another mind, insensibly yield little points which seem nothing, and yet the relinquishing of which saps the root of truthfulness; I need not watch, for I have nothing to guard. The sense of liberty is delicious, much as you may pity me. I believe it ruins a man to owe love to a woman who does not inspire him, who does not rise beyond him in any way. Love is such a traitor, Clifford. I believe I should have given up in time all I most prized, if I had continued a slave to Evelyn. I should not have recognized that I was destroying my soul. Like Samson, the bonds are broken, and I am strong."

"You don't look much like Samson," Clifford said, making a comical face. "Do come away from that window," he added. "There is a terrible wind blowing, and you'll be chilled to the bone. Perhaps, too, you are quite

oblivious of the fact that we have to spend the night here, and that there is not much sleeping accommodation! Perhaps you could extemporize something like a bed, while I make up the fire."

Allan laughed.

"I'll do my best. It won't be a luxurious couch."

He gathered all the drapery and models' dresses which he had accumulated, and a couple of rugs; these he arranged in a heap opposite the fire.

"Now," said Clifford, turning round, "if you put a row of those empty cases on the far side of that exquisite couch, they'll prevent you being blown into the fire by the storm."

Allan obeyed.

"Now, you'll be kind enough to occupy that most fascinating bed."

"My dear fellow, I made it up for you."

"Don't be a fool, Allan. As I sleep most nights at sea on any kind of bunk, the deck, a chest, the rigging, I can get on all right with a rug on the floor. By the way, I shall go shares in this crib, but shall make some slight changes. Amongst others, I shall sometimes

have your rugs shaken or beaten, or in some way set free from the accumulation of dirt, which perhaps you find artistic." He glanced with a disgusted face at a table cover or rug which he had tied round his neck by the fringe, and which trailed on the ground behind him. "There," he added, rolling it round him, and curling himself up near the fire, "it's not quite pleasant to the touch or smell; but it will do admirably."

Allan had lain down without further expostulations. There was silence for a little while between the two men; there was only the sound of a coal falling or the crackling of the blaze, and outside the wild wind, which seemed to grow angrier hour by hour. Allan was looking into the fire. Clifford, with his eyes half closed, was watching him.

"I say, Moore."

"Yes."

"There are two drawbacks to our friendship. You never enjoy fully my delicious stories—they are not perhaps refined, but they are always witty; and you do not sufficiently share my enthusiasm when I am in love."

"The objects of your affections are so

varied that it is too great a strain on my sympathy."

"At the present moment," Clifford went on, with a yawn, "I am trying to bear heroically the separation from Hortense. You see, she fell in love with you first when you were ill, and you treated her with such disdain that she, being one of those loving hearts which must cling to some one, recoiled on me. I accepted her humbly, and virtue being its own reward, I now find myself desperately in love with her!"

Allan laughed.

"It is impossible to a narrow heart like yours to imagine the delight of only tasting the fresh bloom of love, and never clinging till it fades!"

Clifford began to sing in a low voice—

"There's beauty in Susan, in Mary, in Jane,
I can love them all in their turn;
If Susan should treat my fond heart with disdain,
Why Mary's embrace should I spurn?"

And so on, much in the same vein, his voice dropping lower and lower as he saw Allan's eyes close and his head sink back.

When Clifford saw that Allan was really asleep, he sat up and lighted his pipe.

"What a damned shame it is," he thought, as he looked at Allan's white, thin face, "that a contemptible fool of a woman should destroy the life of a man with brains. He'll go into the mines, I suppose, and work till he drops; or if he has not resolution enough for that, he'll let his life drift away into God knows what state of idleness and imbecility. The first fate is the best of the two, so I'll say no word to stop him."

For half an hour Clifford sat and smoked, his eyes resting on Allan most of the time. The latter tossed about, moaning a little in his sleep. At last the words, "Evelyn, Evelyn!" came from his lips with such an accent of misery, that Clifford involuntarily rose and drew close to him.

"It's confoundedly cold over there," he said to himself, as if apologizing for the sudden movement. "I don't see why I should not have the benefit of the storm barricade."

He lay down near Allan, and gently threw one arm round him.

"I don't know," he muttered, "how to comfort the poor devil, but I've heard that

some kind of warm human touch keeps a fellow's heart up."

When the morning sun shone into the bare studio, and Allan woke with the unconquerable sensation of having to look out on a world without joy, his eyes fell at once on Clifford's face close to him, and Clifford's arm flung over his shoulder; and looking at him thus, Allan felt that such friendship was an armour against fate.

END OF VOL. II.

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